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The accepted time for
securing the gospel

Dr. S. Collins—

With the regards of
the Author

Baltimore }
March 2 }—





THE
ACCEPTED TIME
FOR
SECURING THE GOSPEL SALVATION,
AND
FROM THE ANALOGY
Between Temporal and Spiritual Affairs,
ANSWERING
CERTAIN DOCTRINAL EXCUSES
SOMETIMES URGED FOR NEGLECTING IT.

BY
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AUTHOR OF "FAITH AND WORKS."

PHILADELPHIA:
JOSEPH M. WILSON,
No. 111 SOUTH TENTH ST., BELOW CHESTNUT ST.
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P R E F A C E.

THE message of this little book, is designed chiefly for the impenitent. Its urgent call upon them is, no longer to urge excuses for delay, but give immediate attention to their soul's everlasting welfare. And if professors of the religion of Christ, find the truth profitably set forth, might it not be a method of doing good, to place the book in the hands of those, for whom it is especially designed ?

It is true—if the reasoning is correct, and the conclusions fairly drawn from it—the whole will serve equally well, as an argument with those who, though professedly the people of God, do yet, and without doubt conscientiously, reject certain doctrines herein considered, as being alike dishonourable to God, and ruinous to souls. And if, upon the minds of such, any light may be thrown, the work will not have been in vain. Still, controversy is not the object. The aim is rather to benefit those, who may be *practically*

wresting these doctrines to their own destruction.

The fact that God has a well defined time, styled by Him "accepted time"—while multitudes, with indifference, or vain pretexts, are permitting that time to pass away neglected, is sufficient apology for attempting any proper effort to arouse attention, before it is too late. Reader, the hour of God's promises and grace, is fleeing like the shadows. Soon you will pass beyond the grave—be introduced to other and new scenes—and be in rapture or in woe—because of a destiny which you *cannot* change if you would, or *would* not if you could. What that destiny is to be in your case, your brief career on earth determines—for God has hung

"The eternal states of all the dead,
Upon life's feeble strings."

Judging from your present condition, both of heart and life, what is the character of the destiny, which you now may properly anticipate? If you are among the class contemplated in penning this book, you have no faith in Christ, no repentance towards God, and no renewing of the Holy Ghost. And, more than this, you have been so contented to have it so, that you have urged the most trifling excuses, for daily neglecting interests so

vast. This little volume is sent on a mission to you. Its message is, that simply to delay for the present moment, is very dangerous, and may end in ruin—and that some of the excuses, at least, especially those arising out of your inability, sinfulness, or God's sovereign election, which you may have regarded as very strong and sufficient, are really very weak and insufficient. That any force you may attribute to them in spiritual affairs, is equally great in temporal—and that if you are sincere and consistent, they would and ought to influence you the same in all your temporal, as in your spiritual interests. To present and urge this *Analogy* between these two classes of interests, is, indeed, the germ of thought running through the chapters on those several points.

Will you listen? Will you receive the truth it utters, in the name of God? Will you consent to labour and pray for God's salvation, *now*, in God's "accepted time?"

Read candidly each chapter *through*. For a partial reading, especially of some, might leave an impression, wholly different from that designed and desired. The design and desire are, that you feel the importance of immediate attention

to the well being of your soul. Your salvation is my aim—O ! let it be your own.

May God own the book, and bless it, to the conviction and conversion of many a reader. This is now, and ever shall be, the Author's fervent prayer. And, to the Divine glory let all the praise be rendered, for any good it may be instrumental in accomplishing.

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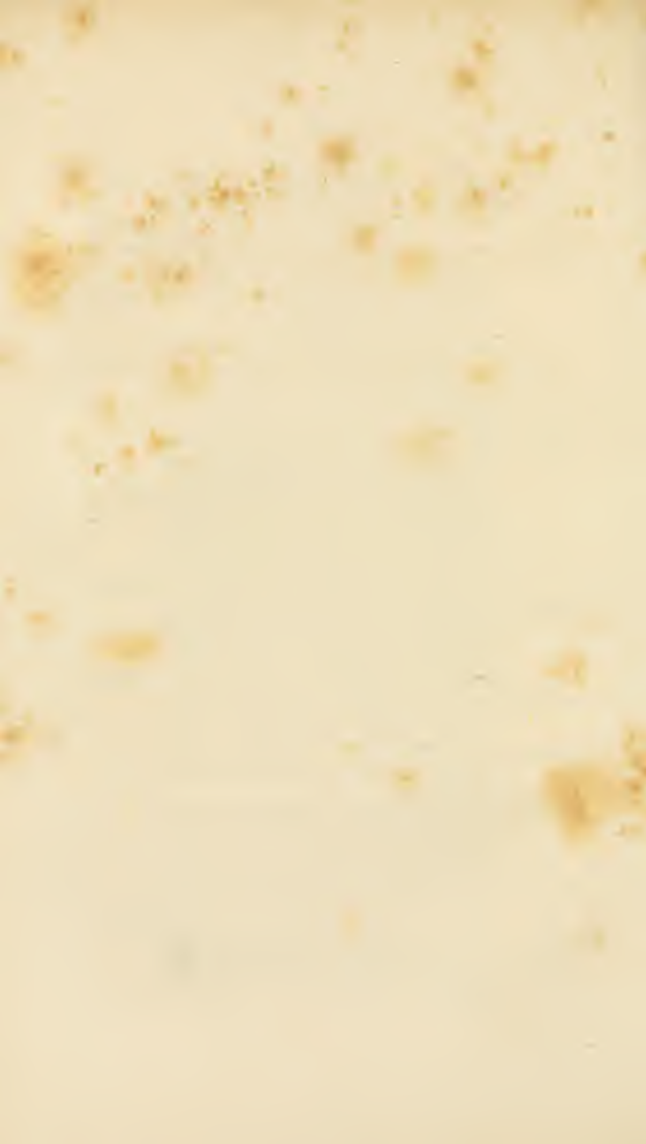
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THE ACCEPTED TIME

FOR

SECURING THE GOSPEL SALVATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF IMMEDIATE ATTENTION TO THE SOUL'S SALVATION.

“ Behold now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation.”—2 Cor. vi. 2.

It is hardly credible, that even the impenitent decide upon a total and final disregard of all, which they know or believe to be essential to their eternal welfare. Varied and urgent as are the excuses which they render, we can easily believe their design to be of a twofold nature

1. To gain present relief from religious and serious thoughts and duties.

2. When reminded of the uncertainty of the present life, to derive comfort, if not merit, from their good intentions.

The design of the present chapter will be, to show the insecurity of a hope, which is wholly

based upon intentions for the future, while the present is neglected. The passage placed at the head of this chapter, by specifying the time of God's willingness to pardon, accept, and save, contains the most powerful argument against the least delay, and in favour of immediate attention to the soul's salvation.

Let us prayerfully consider it, in several particulars :

SECT. 1. THIS SALVATION IS ABSOLUTELY NEEDED BY ALL.

Salvation implies a loss, from which there has been, or is to be, a recovery. That loss has sin, both for its essence, and its cause. This sin, and consequent need of being saved, commences with our being, for so we are abundantly taught in the Word. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," that is, all mankind, by ordinary descent, are guilty and corrupt. "The heart," that is, the heart of man, or of all mankind, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." "The wicked go astray as soon as they be born."

We all are, "by nature, children of wrath." Such, though sad, is our true condition.

"Conceived in sin, Oh, wretched state!
Before we draw our breath,
The first young pulse begins to beat
Iniquity and death."

This view, alone, presents us as in perishing

need of this salvation : for, continuing thus, and the Bible teaching is, we are “condemned already.”

Moreover, if we contemplate the actual life, it only aggravates the alarming picture of our loss.

The testimony of Scripture, which is but the testimony of God, is that a curse rests upon all who fail of *perfect* obedience to the divine will. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. Gal. iii. 10. Whosoever keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all. Jas. ii. 10. But the same Scripture declares : That all have failed. There is none that doeth good, no not one. All have sinned. Hence, all are under the curse, and this beyond all power in ourselves to remedy. By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in His sight. Rom. iii. 12, 23, 20.

The office of the law is, To secure perfect obedience, or the execution of its penalty in case of failure.

Hence, seeing we all have failed, the unrelenting claim upon us is, that the threatened curse should be inflicted.

“ In vain we ask God’s righteous law
To justify us now ;
Since to convince and to condemn,
Is all the law can do.”

This teaching is, at the same time, both stern

and severe, and yet true—true, because clearly taught and established by the Bible.

Be the penalty of sin whatsoever, it would be awful, if God had threatened it. For, if Balak could say to Balaam, “I know that he whom thou cursest, is cursed;” much more may this be affirmed of the almighty God.

But then the curse itself is terrific. The wages of sin is death. Rom. vi. 23. The fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. Rev. xxi. 8. Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire. Matt. xxv. 41.

Hence, to be under the curse, is to be exposed and justly subject to this death. Not temporal death, whose pangs, though keen, are soon passed; but an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. 2 Thess. i. 9. Not an extinction of vitality, but a torture without remedy or relief:

“To be always consuming, yet unconsumed,
Always dying, yet never dead.”

SECT. 2. ALL HAVE SEASONS WHEN THEY FEEL THEIR
NEED OF THIS SALVATION, AND FORM PUR-
POSES CONCERNING IT.

Deliverance from the foregoing threatened evils, the Bible styles salvation: and the name

is most expressive and appropriate. In view of the awful evil from which it rescues, and the exalted good to which it introduces, so desirable is this salvation that, I doubt not, all, and therefore you, my reader, more or less at times, have thoughts and purposes concerning it. At such times at least, it must seem needful; for how, otherwise, could you think of dwelling with devouring fire, with everlasting burnings? Isa. xxxiii. 14. Though, by others, ranked even among the hardened and sceptical, yet, that there is a *possibility* of danger here, came home to your mind and conscience with such power, as almost to demand a full, though constrained admission, both of your danger and your need.

That admission in your case may have been but momentary : for you may have quickly rushed forth from the circumstances of loneliness or solemnity that compelled you to think ; and thinking, to be serious ; and thinking seriously, to admit the possibility of your danger ; and found yourself again surrounded by jolly merriment, or crowding cares of life.

That admission, too, may have been successfully concealed and kept a secret. Besides yourself, none knew it, other than that Being who can look in and read the tablets of your heart.

Still it was an admission. And, though so concealed as to exist only in "the thought afar off," God knew it, and suddenly stamped a fac simile, or real likeness of it, in the book of re-

membrance treasured for the judgment. Solemn thought ! Of every such season you will then be reminded. Seasons when, if one might have looked in even upon your solitude, your own quakings would have been sufficient proof, that such admission had so recently been treading over your heart, as to leave still in freshness its footprints there. And it never can alter the fact, though on each such occasion, by the pleasures and cares of life, you caused or permitted those footprints to be effaced, as the heavings of the ocean would wash a record from the sand which lines its shore.

And this admission bore so powerfully upon your own personal interests—interests which so very far surpassed all others of which imagination can conceive, and it being so universally the nature of our race to esteem and desire that which makes for personal welfare, that it was impossible for you, while harbouring the admission, not to have resolved concerning your relation to those realities in the future.

And your resolution was not of a general nature. It was prompted by the feeling, that yours was a condition of hazard at least ; that such realities were worthy your attention ; and accompanied by the secret desire, that all in them of value to yourself, and within your power to attain, might yet be yours.

Reader, does not your conscience bear witness, that I decide correctly ? If so, you have felt a

desire for that to which the Bible, by the term salvation, is so often referring you; a salvation which rescues from sorrow beyond the grave, and secures an eternal possession of unparalleled good. In those lucid intervals, few and momentary perhaps, as has been said, yet intervals of sober thoughts for the future, you did in very fact resolve concerning your salvation.

Thus far it was well. Oh! think of it again, and resolve concerning it. Without doubt, it is a great salvation: for on the left hand is the awful lake, deep, dark, painful, sorrowful, hopeless for ever and ever, the doom and the abode of sinners, and you are a sinner; but this salvation can deliver you from that awful lake. It is a great salvation: for on the right hand is the heavenly kingdom, ample, glorious, peaceful, joyful, the everlasting home of those who are saved; and, if you are ever of that number, this salvation will bear you thither.

Then think, Oh! think of it again. Again, most seriously, resolve concerning it; for, undoubtedly, your highest, your only real happiness is at stake.

Determine for yourself, what it is in your power to give, or where is aught you can receive, that shall prove a satisfactory substitute for salvation—so that, if forfeited, you shall still be happy and enjoy. If you are not saved, if your soul is lost, I ask, yea Christ the dying, risen

Saviour asks: What can be given in exchange?
Mark viii. 36, 37.

But seriously consider:—

SECT. 3. THAT THE VERY SAME CIRCUMSTANCES
WHICH RENDERED THIS SALVATION NE-
CESSARY, MAKE IT A MATTER OF GRACE,
OR UNDESERVED FAVOUR, ON THE PART
OF HIM WHO BESTOWS IT, AND OF THOSE
WHO RECEIVE IT.

This proposition is based upon the following acknowledged principle. In order to claim reward, as a matter of *right*, our service according to the conditions agreed upon, without variation or exception, must be entirely finished.

This holds true of all the varied callings and pursuits among men. To claim the promised sum, it is necessary to meet all the conditions upon which that sum had been pledged. Faithfully complying with those conditions, you may not only expect, but rightfully demand the reward. But if at all you come short in the service, and yet receive the reward at first proposed, it will undoubtedly be an act of favour from him who bestowed it.

View the application of the same principle, with reference to human governments. Let a man pass life, free from all those crimes which the laws regard as capital, or to be punished with death, and, by virtue of his obedience and as his right, he may claim his life. But, if he break

only one such law, in only a single instance, he no longer of right can present such a claim.

Although he may have passed a century of years before the act; or, though in every other respect he may have perfectly conformed to the laws of the land; he is now guilty of a crime which forfeits life. And, that act once performed, the time will never, because it can never occur, in which this charge against him will not continue to be true—consequently, can never occur, in which he will not continue to be guilty. Now as the guilt, in the first instance, placed him under condemnation to death; so long as he is measured by the law alone, so long must he abide under that condemnation. For mere succession of years—yea of ages—yea of ages protracted to eternity, is not obedience, neither is it an alternative, nor an equivalent for the obedience which the law requires.

Mere justice, therefore, and the measure of that justice being the same law which before was the man's rule of duty, now that he has transgressed, as certainly requires his dying, as before it demanded his obedience; and must continue to require it, till the object is realized.

Every trial and conviction of any capital crime, clearly illustrates this. The inquiry in such cases turns, not upon the man's past course of life, but, whether he has committed the identical act for which he has been arraigned. If so, whatever may have been his previous character,

the court decides, and the community agree with that decision, that he deserves to die, and that death alone can satisfy the law. If this sentence is not executed upon the transgressor in person, one of two things must be true as a reason. Either, the full requirement of the law ceases to be demanded; or, justice is satisfied with some equivalent, as a substitute for the guilty offender.

This is applicable, and strictly true, when applied to the government of God. If those who offend against that government, do not in person suffer the penalty, it must be owing either to the relaxation of the law, or sufficiency of a substitute. But, with God it is impossible that the former should ever occur; for, His very throne has its habitation in righteousness and judgment. Ps. xcvii. 2. By the Bible, however, we are taught that the latter is not only possible, but has in reality taken place. A substitute has in mercy been provided. This gracious provision appears in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, "made under the law," and, by "the cursed death of the cross," "offering up of Himself a sacrifice, to satisfy" the same "Divine justice," that against all sin and every sinner, has threatened the penalty of death. Gal. iv. 4, 5.

It was an act of pure, undeserved mercy; because the sinner himself was the proper subject for suffering and death. By no possibility could these be inflicted upon, or required of Christ, until he had come forth voluntarily assuming the

obligation on behalf of the actually guilty. Jno. x. 15, 18.

This view of salvation by the intervention of Christ, the Bible continually presents. It was all of *grace*, that the Son was willing to come on such an errand. Jno. i. 17. It was equally of *grace*, that the Father was willing to acknowledge that death as vicarious, or in the place of others. Rom. v. 8.

Therefore we find, that the salvation thus secured, without limit or exception, is declared to be all of grace; that is, emphatically, in the Bible use of the term, favour from God to sinners as ill-deserving. By grace ye are saved. Eph. ii. 5, 8. God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling: not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. 2 Tim. i. 9. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Rom. iii. 24. In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace. Eph. i. 8.

“ Grace first contrived the way,
To save rebellious man,
And all the steps that grace display,
Which drew the wondrous plan.”

SECT. 4. IF SALVATION IS ALL OF GRACE, THEN HE WHO BESTOWS IT, IS PERFECTLY FREE IN SELECTING ALL THE CONDITIONS CONCERNING IT.

Without controversy, a favour is altogether in the power and subject to the direction of him who has it to bestow. If a fellow creature supplicates your aid, you feel at liberty to give or to refuse.

And, if you give, you feel at liberty, also, to base your kindness upon any reasonable conditions of your own selection, positively requiring compliance, before you bestow the desired and needed aid. Among those conditions might be a limitation of time, within which he must perform what you require. If he fail to comply, you would feel no longer bound, even by your *promise* of favour.

This principle, as truly and as strictly, applies to the salvation of the gospel. When God looked down upon our race lying in ruin, and offered deliverance; it certainly, as we have seen, was a most undeserved mercy. Hence, with the greatest propriety may he present his own conditions, a compliance with which shall be essential to the reception of the mercy which he offers.

This right God has actually exercised; for with every offer of favour and of life, the condition of *faith* in the mediation and work of Christ his Son, most prominently appears. "He that

believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Jno. iii. 36. If language possibly can express a condition, surely this does. Endless life is offered to each who believes in Christ.

But, in case any does not thus believe, he is threatened not only with exclusion from that life, but a continuance under the same wrath of God, which rested upon him, as he came into the world. Eph. ii. 3. Here then, undoubtedly, is the condition of faith, God's right in presenting which none can question.

For the same reason, and just as clearly is it His right, to specify the *time*, within which He will require us to comply with this condition of accepting His Son. And so definitely may He determine it, that beyond the set time, He may rightfully and properly withhold the offered favour. The very idea of favour, wholly unmerited and undeserved on our part, involves this right.

SECT. 5. THE CONDITIONAL TIME THUS SELECTED, IS WHAT THE BIBLE PRESENTS AS THE ACCEPTED TIME.—2 Cor. vi. 2.

By "accepted time" is understood its being acceptable to God, of His selection and approval, and, therefore, which may become a "day of salvation" to us. In any individual case, the time thus referred to is that, in which God's

judgments are said to linger, and God himself is represented as waiting to be gracious. Isa. xxx. 18. Waiting—restraining wrath, covering with its sheath His glittering sword, and at the same time declaring, that He takes no pleasure in the death of any. Eze. xviii. 32. Saying to all who have or hear His word, in the language of affectionate entreaty, Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: for why will ye die? Eze. xxxiii. 11. And, again, as to Israel of old, Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Isa. i. 18. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Isa. lv. 7.

Could language be more affectionate, explicit, and earnest, calling upon men to come out from the ways of sin, return to God and holiness, and giving assurances of His favour? And who can doubt that *that* is a most important period, whenever it may be, during which such language is addressed by God to sinning men? Just think of it. God, insulted and hated, entreating even His rebellious enemies to accept of life and favour; and offering, upon their return to Him, abundantly and freely to pardon them.

And as this life and favour, this abundant par-

don, constitute the salvation to which allusion has been made, it is a time in which He is offering them salvation, and entreating them to accept it. Who would disregard such offer and entreaties, so earnestly and affectionately made? And knowing that there is a set time, beyond which they have no warrant to hope for a continuance of this offer, who would not desire to hasten, before that time has fully passed? I know not one, who even momentarily regards the favour and feels the need of it, but will readily admit, that it is desirable thus to hasten—hasten, to return to God, while yet it is a time accepted.

I know not one who thinks of being too late—too late, to find an open door, to hear the voice of mercy, to receive an abundant pardon. I know not one who would linger in the plain—linger, till the storm is beating, the fire devouring, and the fertility changed into barrenness and salt.

I cannot doubt that this feeling of desire for timely escape and safety, has been experienced by the reader. It is well thus to feel, and I certainly would pray, God speed you as you hasten. I certainly would pray, that you be not too late to escape the descending storm, to find an open door, to hear the voice of mercy, or to receive an abundant pardon.

And since you thus desire, as one sincerely anxious that you may not fail, let me entreat you carefully to ascertain and bear in mind, that

which God acknowledges and has revealed as His accepted time. For, if you come then, truly and sincerely come, God's word is pledged that it shall be to you a day of salvation.

The fact of your ever planning, and expecting to receive the favour, implies that you do not intend to pass this accepted time, this day of salvation. But, still you are delaying. Hence, practically, with you the idea must exist, that this time which God styles accepted, is a protracted season, which at your pleasure you may improve. Otherwise, how could you plan seasonably to improve it; and yet so long, so constantly neglect the matter which is proposed, as appropriate for that time alone? If this is your lamentable case, prayerfully follow me through the consideration of the next section.

SECT. 6. WHAT HAS GOD DECLARED TO BE WITH HIM AN ACCEPTED TIME?

That is, how long may one neglect, and yet hope, reasonably hope, certainly and for ever, to secure salvation?

This, without doubt, is a most important inquiry—Because, confessedly, there is nothing so momentous as the salvation of which the Bible speaks. Because God has mentioned the precise time which, for that purpose, He styles accepted. And because multitudes are lingering in the work of striving to secure it. Then what is that time?

It is worthy of most serious thought, with

what a oneness of voice all Scripture answers this inquiry. Choose ye *this day* whom ye will serve. Josh. xxiv. 15. How long *halt* ye between two opinions? 1 Kings xviii. 21. Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Matt. vi. 33. *To-day*, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Heb. iii. 7, 8. Behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

Could language be more explicit and definite? And can any, who understands the meaning and use of ordinary language, mistake the idea which it designs to convey by the terms, "To-day," "this day," "now?" If your neighbour speaks to you of some desirable end to be gained, and employs the word *now* as an essential condition, do you not feel that the time actually passing is that now? That to linger beyond that time then passing, would be a failure to comply with that condition, and a just reason for withholding the proposed good? If you say to a child that you wish him *now* to perform a certain service, do you feel satisfied to find him delaying until the morrow,—indeed, until the next hour? Most certainly not. If you use the term with determination and definite meaning, you expect him at once, without any delay, to enter upon and perform the task. *Delaying* to perform that which has been commanded to be done now, is as *truly disobedience*, as though the service were wholly neglected. And those who have a proper jeal-

ousy for their authority, and are prompt to claim obedience, always proceed upon this principle; in the former, as really as in the latter case, inflicting punishment, or withholding reward.

Permit me, then, to remind the reader, that the infinite God understands the meaning and force of language chosen and employed by Himself. He knows full well the idea which any such term, both from its nature and its use, actually conveys.

Hence, He could be under no liability of mistake on this point. No danger of selecting a word designed by Him to convey an idea, essentially different from that received by those to whom that word is addressed.

That is, if He says *now*, speaking to those with whom that is a familiar term, He means, what they usually and most readily understand, *the passing moment*. And when He uses it, after their own manner, as a condition of securing or receiving good, He regards the neglect of that passing moment, as they regard it, a non-compliance with the condition—consequently, a just ground for denying to them the good which had been proposed. This, the more especially, as the offer itself, and allowing of any time was all of grace.

So that if He says “now” is an agreeable, “accepted time”.with Him, and thus speaks of no other for securing the great salvation; then is the salvation of each, in effect and in fact, staked

upon the time now actually passing. That is, God, by His promise even, binds Himself to none beyond the present fleeting moment.

No other than that is mentioned in His Word. Upon no other condition does He permit His servants to encourage any in hope and comfort, at thought of future safety.

As the whole thing is a matter of grace, He, as He pleases, may or may not, graciously repeat the offer. But, if He does, it will always be on the same condition as to time. Hence, should the reader neglect or resist the present attempt to turn his attention to these great and momentous interests, he may not, and from the nature of the condition mentioned, he has no right to hope that the offer will ever afterwards be repeated, that he will ever again have it in his power to accept of the gospel salvation.

And should this result, in your case, prove to be a historical as well as possible fact, you could not complain. The offer of salvation now made to you, is the result of merest mercy in God. If you fail of the salvation thus offered to you, sufficient explanation of that failure will appear in the fact, that while He said, Now accept, you practically replied, When I have a convenient season I will call for thee. Acts xxiv. 25. That is, while you were wholly dependent on gracious kindness, you yet attempted to dictate the terms upon which you would accept of its needed provisions. What presumption! And yet

how common ! But though you presume thus to act, there is an increasing possibility, yea probability, that this salvation will soon for the last time be slighted. This, with the reasons for so thinking, shall engage us in the next section.

SECT. 7. NON COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONDITION OF IMMEDIATE ATTENTION TO THE INTERESTS OF THE SOUL, RENDERS IT MORE AND MORE PROBABLE, THAT THE OPPORTUNITY OF SALVATION MAY NOT BE REPEATED.

The first reason for this remark is, the uncertainty of life, which, in theory at least, will be readily granted. Two things may here be noticed, as bearing upon this point.

The first is, that when death does come, it will positively and for ever cut off all possibility of change, either of character or condition. The Bible alone must guide us here. In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. Eccl. xi. 3. The time is at hand : he that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still. Rev. xxii. 10, 11. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest. Eccl. ix. 10.

These are some of the passages, bearing on this point, which are full of meaning, appropriate,

clear, and decisive. If so, then, whatever is delayed until after that change, must be delayed for ever. Even though it be the happiness and salvation of the immortal soul, it must be delayed for ever. It is an awful thought. Dying without our salvation being secure, and yet henceforth, through eternity, no other opportunity afforded in which to secure it.

“Eternity ! without a bound,
To guilty souls a dreadful sound.”

But in the next place, no man knows how soon that eventful moment may come. If in catechetical language I ask, “Is your life very short, frail, and uncertain?” no one could deny the truthfulness of the answer which that same Catechism has furnished for each that lives, “Yes, perhaps I may die the next moment.”

So the Bible. Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. Jas. iv. 14. Ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh. Matt. xxv. 13.

So experience. How many, without the least previous intimation, go hurriedly out of life by diseases of the heart, apoplexy, “disease unknown,” or “poison taken through mistake?”

How many, by frantic horses, collisions, explosions, wrecks, drowning? How many, by falls from heights above, or to depths below the surface of the earth, by falling bodies, or falling houses? How many, by the undesigned dis-

charge of loaded fire-arms, by machinery, assassination, lightning, fires? In short, do not

“Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to the tomb?”

True, you may not thus die; yet, as multitudes of others have, perhaps you may. And just here is the point, where appears the great uncertainty which gathers around the subject, as to time. Taught both by the Bible and experience, you necessarily must confess, that at any one moment you have no pledge of living till the next. So that every moment's neglect of your soul, is putting off a work, for the performance of which you do not know, and no friend or created intelligence can assure you, that you will ever have another moment. This is true of all, and, therefore, of you, my reader.

But God, the same God who says, “*Now* is the accepted time,” is the One who also has in His own hands the issues of life and death. He alone absolutely controls every providence by which, through process sudden or protracted, life here is terminated. No life by any providence ceases, till He has ordered it. But, when the time of His purpose has come, No man has power in the day of death, or is able to procure a discharge from that war. Eccl. viii. 8.

When, therefore, the life of one still impenitent is suddenly cut short, God has done it. But we now see, that there is something more in it than

a "remarkable death," or occasion for gloom and sorrow. It is one way in which God designs to give fearful testimony to that man, and a solemn warning to all who knew him, that He literally means *the passing moment*, when He says, "*Now* is the day of salvation." That is, the time comes in such a case, when there remains not a single moment beyond. Hence, the time comes when only a moment's delay puts it finally beyond his power to secure the proposed good, the salvation of his soul. And this will be none the less true, though millions continue to live in sin, forgetfulness of God, and neglect of their souls, after he has gone.

Owing to this uncertainty of the case, who can tell—how can the reader know—that he is not now actually spending that final moment, so critical and eventful?

But there is a second reason for fearing the result alluded to, at the beginning of this section. Even though life may be protracted, the day of grace long before may cease.

That is, because a man is in life, surrounded by its comforts, and in the formal possession of the *means* of grace, it does not follow thence that he has, and will at any time continue to have it in his power, to secure the gospel salvation.

That he still lives, will continually present a reason why the godly should urge him to repent. Because, during the life even of the most vile and abandoned, none can pronounce or know that he is

past hope and mercy. Much less would we be so disposed, in the case of those who were of fairer exterior, and more regular in outward life. So far as our actions toward others are concerned, all this is freely admitted.

But, then, as respects the impenitent himself, some portions of the divine word ought to serve for instruction and warning on the point before us. They distinctly warn us of the fact that, even *before death*, men may be given up of God to judicial blindness and abandonment. At the same time, also, they instruct us into the *cause* of this terrible penalty.

Our Saviour's plaintive lamentation over Jerusalem was, Behold your house is left unto you desolate—*is* left desolate, and therefore years before the time of its full execution had arrived. Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. But what is stated as the cause, leading to so direful a result? Because when God's prophets called and instructed, while divine mercy patiently waited and invited, and the Saviour Himself offered to gather and welcome, to protect and love them—they would not.

Again, concerning the Pharisees, He charges his disciples, Let them alone. Why? Because He had given instruction in their hearing, and they had not only failed of profit, but were actually offended at the teaching. Matt xv. 12, 14.

The apostle speaks of God's giving up the heathen to a reprobate mind. That is, a state of mind in which, by God, they were left to

themselves. Why? Because they did not like to retain the knowledge of God, and when they knew Him, they did not glorify Him as God. Rom. i. 21, 28.

Of ancient Israel God declares, I gave them up unto their own heart's lusts. Simply removed the restraints of His spirit and grace, and suffered them to live as they pleased. The result was, instead of obedience to the will of God, "they walked in *their own* counsels." Ps. lxxxi. 12. Why? Because when He taught and reproved, they would not hearken to his voice; and Israel would none of Him.

The divine charge to the prophet is, Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee. Why? Because of their wickedness. Though he had spoken to them, rising up early and speaking, they would not hear; though He had called, they had not answered. Jer. vii. 13, 16.

By Solomon God says, They shall call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. Why? Because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of His counsel; they despised all His reproof. Prov. i. 28—30.

All this seems clearly to show, that when God said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, Gen. vi. 3, it was a threatening of fearful im-

port, and of much more extended application than to the antediluvians. It is a standing intimation to our race, that by each moment's disregard of the divine offers and warnings, we increase the danger, either of being left at that point, where truth and the means of grace might cease to be employed, or cease their practical effect to subdue and save. Hence, if you, my reader, are now a neglecter of religion, and of the offers of mercy in Christ, how can you know that passing the present moment in this manner, will not place those offers beyond your acceptance and your reach ? -

For this is not to be regarded as an idle, unmeaning threatening. Without doubt, it meets with an execution in every instance, where thoughts of a season more favourable in the future are indulged, but that future, so favourable, never comes.

One thinks of old age as auspicious, because the gaiety of youth, and business of manhood will no longer urge him. Then it is his purpose, deliberately to hear, read, meditate upon these great concerns, and make his calling sure.

If you please, pass over the millions who are not permitted to see the old age of which they speak. Grant that some do attain it. Yet by making dull the ear, and sightless the eye, and decrepit the frame, and doted the intellect, in how many instances has God frustrated their plans of safety after a life of sinful postpone-

ment? Who has not seen and known the aged impenitent thus deserted and desolate?

What can be its meaning? Is it not that in the day when God graciously offered to save him, he would not? Therefore, by stopping every avenue through which they might reach his heart, God has positively bidden his servants and messages of mercy to let him alone.

Another thinks of his final sickness, as a fit time to be serious, pray, and embrace the gospel; and, with that persuasion, he disregards that part of God's requirement which says to him, "*Now* is the accepted time."

Not to dwell upon the fact, that vast multitudes go out of life without any protracted disease—think through what scenes many others pass. Terrific agony, which banishes deliberate thought; or burning fever, which rises so high as to start reason, and leave the man a raving maniac. How shall we account for this? Will it not harmonize with the Scripture teaching already cited, to reply, That it is God, dealing with the man who once and again passed indifferently, if not scornfully, by the auspicious "now?" That it is God absolutely requiring his spiritual interests to be let alone, by putting him in such a tumult of disease and agonies, that no call of mercy shall be heard within its awful confusion, or, by driving him to madness, putting it beyond his power to welcome the heavenly calls though heard, and to embrace the offers?

Still another thinks of this urgent business to be completed, or that amount of gain to be secured.

After all this, when ministers of the gospel and pious friends come around to pray for and counsel him, he expects to welcome their visits, thoughtfully listen to their discourse, and receive an answer to their fervent prayers. In such anticipations, he pauses not at the thought, that many lay plans for business and for gain which they never realize—consequently, can never realize that which depended upon such success for its condition. How many a providence can and does lead men to complete life and die, where not a single pious relative is at hand, to turn his thoughts to God and heaven; where no minister appears, to explain the way of salvation; in Christ's stead, to beseech him to be reconciled to God; and, in humble, fervent prayer, to bear his case before the mercy seat!

And does not every such case, of one who put off to the future, his reception of what God graciously offered now to give, present a fearful exhibition of a once neglecting, and still impenitent sinner, being let alone by God—literally, and lamentably, and fatally alone? Suppose, reader, such circumstances should be your own, could your present planning for being saved prove at all successful?

But granting that all these may combine in their fairest light—a calm old age, a tolerable disease, a clear and active mind, and numerous

anxious, counselling, praying friends. Would even certainty of this, warrant present delay, or deliberate postponement? Suppose just the circumstances you demand, and think your need. But then, fail not to suppose again, that though thus situated, *the Divine Spirit may not be there*—with His only, all-sufficient power to carry home the truth, and prompt, and guide, and seal the prayer of faith. Think you, that without His convicting, regenerating, and sanctifying work, those counsels and entreaties will reach and renew your heart? Think you, that without His aid, others can cause you to feel your sinfulness, and absolute need of the righteousness of Christ, and originate in you that faith which works by love and secures peace with God? Or, can you imagine that thus unaided, those prayers of the godly on your behalf, will then be answered in your pardon and adoption? Moreover, is not all this to add insult to sin, by ascribing to *human* power, that which God claims as being peculiarly His own Spirit's work? Time and again does He most emphatically present that claim. Not by might, nor by power, but by *my Spirit*, saith the Lord. Zech. iv. 6. Except a man be born of water, and of *the Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jno. iii. 5. Or does not your course presume upon your ability, at your pleasure, to invite and win back a Spirit long vexed and grieved, when God is saying to you, *My Spirit shall not always strive with man?*

Gen. vi. 3. When He is, therefore, thus assuring you, that the time possibly may come when, though you should feel the need of help, that Spirit will be withheld?

And is this his awful threatening never executed, so as to awaken fear that—

“ the Spirit of grace,
Long grieved and resisted, may take his sad flight ;
And leave thee in darkness to finish thy race
To sink in the gloom of eternity’s night ?”

Then to whom is the reference in His Word, when speaking of some, whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron? 1 Tim. iv. 2. Of others, who are past feeling? Eph. iv. 19. Or, of others still, who, though they feel their danger, and are lashed by conscience, yet when they call upon God for help, he will not answer; when they earnestly seek Him, shall not find Him? Prov. i. 28. Verily, in such cases, His command to His servants and to His Spirit—“ Let them alone,” must have been literally obeyed. Otherwise, would there not be times of feeling? Would not the longing, agonizing prayer from a heart and state of sorrow, receive an answer? To be left thus, whatever else may seem to favour, surely is a most fearful point to reach.

And, reader, if you continue still to disregard the voice of love and mercy, how can you know that, in some or other of the methods mentioned, you may not judicially be given up of God—let

alone by the offers and messages of His grace, or let alone by His needed Spirit?

And surely you cannot wonder if with you, such should be the case; if, being heedless, prayerless in the present, whatever your good intentions for the future, you should reach that limit, where you shall be deprived of those who might give you counsel, and present your case to God in prayer; or, where you yourself shall no longer possess the power of prayer or thought; or, where your despairing thoughts shall thrill with agony, while your beseeching cry is unanswered and unheard.

Just think of it. The mighty God, with boundless blessings, stooping to you a worm; and yet that worm, with slimy stroke, dashing them for ever, or passing with indifference by them. Jehovah Himself saying, "*Now* is the accepted time;" while your practical response is, When I have a convenient season I will call for thee. The eternal Judge proclaiming, "*Now* is the day of salvation;" but you replying, In sickness, old age, after business or pleasure, I will be saved. Have you forgotten that this salvation is offered by God, without any claim or merit, but much ill desert, on your part, and that *present* time is ever a prominent condition for your accepting it? Do you bear in mind that this God has other interests to regard, than thus to continue a slighted offer of His grace, which, being all of grace, He

may at any time lawfully and consistently withhold ?

The cycles and hosts of eternity are subject to his control, and all are sustained and marshalled with consummate wisdom and excellent order. And, as every other event, the descent of each rebellious spirit, whose throes are to agitate the surgings of Tophet, is timed by Him—Timed ! did I say ? Ah ! the peals of *eternity* shall knell its loss. Oh ! then, let me urge upon you immediate, speedy attention to the call of God, and the interests of your soul. *Immediate* attention is *your duty*, when God says “Now ;” it is *your interest*, when He so often refuses any other time than now. Therefore, let nothing—Oh ! let nothing cause you to postpone this work.

But while I thus urge you, I am aware of the tendency of the carnal heart to raise objections, drawn from various sources—some even from Bible truth itself—against making this needful attention immediate. Please follow me, therefore, with thought and prayer, while in the remaining chapters, I endeavour to show the insufficiency and invalidity of these excuses. Because most anxious do I feel that you should—

“Hasten, O sinner, to be blest,
And stay not for to-morrow’s sun ;
For fear the curse should thee arrest,
Before the morrow is begun.”

CHAPTER II.

THE PLEA, "I CANNOT CHANGE MY OWN HEART," AN INSUFFICIENT EXCUSE, FOR NEGLECTING GOD'S "ACCEPTED TIME."

No man can come unto me, except the Father that hath sent me draw him. Jno. vi. 44.

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it : except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Ps. cxxvii. 1.

THE two passages at the heading of this chapter, present both a scriptural guide to the writer, and a scriptural test for the reader. By the slightest inspection of them it is manifest, that the objection before us can be *truly* neither removed nor answered, by denying the sinner's inability to change his own heart.

Still, with the help of God, I am very anxious to prevent any from wresting truth to their own destruction. In order to this, as plainly and as directly as possible, I shall endeavour to set forth the meaning and force of both these passages.

The one from John is very strong—*No man can come* unto me, except the Father that hath sent me draw (literally, drag) him. What does this language teach? Very evidently, three
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leading truths: The existence of an effective power; a person totally dependent upon that power; and means of communication between the person and the power. Fully and candidly contemplating these, I trust, will lead to a satisfactory and scriptural answer to the much urged objection, which it is proposed now to consider.

SECT. 1. THE DRAWING HERE MENTIONED, IMPLIES A
PERSON TOTALLY DEPENDENT.

In the case more immediately before us, that helpless person is the sinner, and *every* sinner—"No man can come." What language could be stronger than this? It utterly denies all possibility of our coming to Christ, that is, of our receiving the gospel salvation; unless it be by aid apart from, and without the individual himself. No doubt our physical nature, in all its powers, is very far inferior to what it would have been, had we not fallen. Yet the inability here referred to, relates chiefly to the truth, that it is our *moral, spiritual* powers which the corruption and depravity of the fall effect. But we must neither forget nor deny that it is a real helplessness. This seems to be without controversy, if we give a natural meaning, and full weight to the passage before us. And the same equally appears in parallel declarations of Scripture.

Thus the apostle speaks of men, as *dead* in trespasses and sins. Eph. ii. 1. Again he says, We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were

all dead; and that He died for all. 2 Cor. v. 14. It is admitted that the full penalty of sin, includes both temporal and eternal death. But, as already observed, and as is confirmed by the qualification "*in* trespasses and sins," deadness here chiefly refers to the spiritual nature. Yet it is nevertheless and really a death.

What evidence have we of such death? Consider its analogy to temporal death. When the *body* dies, it is totally insensible to its situation, and to all the objects which surround it. So in spiritual matters. The unchanged sinner is, as he appears, wholly insensible to the urgent claims of God, and to his own situation as exposed and tending to ruin. Pour into the ear of the lifeless corpse, warnings of danger in its present exposed condition, or speak to it of the beauties and grandeur around it; and do you cause a single effort to be put forth, or awaken the first warm pulsation of the heart? And is it not equally true, that we long and often speak to men of their spiritual danger, while they sit as calmly as though the heavens gathered not a cloud? We present to them something of the attractive greatness, excellence, and loveliness of God, especially as manifested in Jesus Christ; show him to be "the Chief among ten thousand," "altogether lovely;" dwell also upon His many exceeding rich and precious promises, while they seem quite as indifferent, as though we pointed them to "a root out of dry ground."

All know that this is the case. In many instances has this indifference continued from infancy to hoary age, and the individuals have gone down to the grave, unmoved by the danger, unallured by the loveliness, which had so often been urged upon their regard. And all this, too, where men are not destitute of corresponding feeling in other matters. Tell them of temporal danger, and they delay not to avoid it. Present an object of nature or of art, sufficiently beautiful or grand, and they are enraptured with the view.

Then why the difference? Wherefore the insensibility in the one case, and not in the other? The Bible assigns as the reason, that as to their spiritual concerns, men are dead. And death is a reason for insensibility. No spiritual life or love, no spiritual power or vision—and how otherwise could it be, than that objects of a spiritual nature pass unheeded by? The pulsations of spiritual life having ceased, is an adequate cause why all the other powers of the spiritual man are unstrung, and why, in the work of regaining that life, all are declared to be totally helpless. “No man *can* come.”

But the helplessness of mankind does not end here. If we carefully compare the two passages at the commencement of this chapter, it must appear evident, that the cases which they present, as to the point before us, are perfectly analogous. In the latter, a house to be built, and a city to

be guarded, are the objects presented. Two very common occurrences in ordinary life. Yet, common and familiar as they are, and as much as we find them enlisting the attention and energies of men, notice the language concerning them. Not merely that the house to be built, and the city to be kept, are objects which cannot effect themselves; but, which makes the language far more striking in its analogy to the leading truth before us, even the men employed, of themselves, can accomplish nothing. Unless other power come to their assistance, it will be wholly in vain for them to undertake the task. They *labour in vain* to build; the watchman waketh but *in vain*. This, too, without any reference to qualifications arising from health, riches, or union and co-operation with their fellow-men.

Hence we are taught the very manifest truth, that be their advantages small or great, of themselves, men are totally unable to effect the most common result in the business of life.

But this is the identical truth, touching their spiritual matters—and the passages are not in the least more explicit and positive in the latter case, than in the former. True, the one referring to their spiritual concerns says, that not one is able, of himself, to come to Christ, or secure salvation. But, quite as emphatically and unequivocally, the other, alluding to ordinary and worldly interests, declares that, of himself, man is not able to build a house or keep a city.

According to the Bible, therefore, whether things of the present or future life be considered, the sinner's inability is a truth of *universal* application. Hence, we can no more consistently plead that inability as a reason for inattention to one class of duties, than to the other.

Whatever arguments from this source are thought applicable, as palliating neglect of preparation for the life that is to come, have *precisely the same and equal force* in reference to the life that is. And whatever is esteemed as without weight and foolish in the latter case, is liable to the *same charge of lightness and folly* in the former. But additional truths are taught in these passages. That we may intelligently pursue the inquiry concerning this teaching, let us notice—

SECT. 2. THE DRAWING NOT ONLY IMPLIES A HELPLESS PERSON, BUT EXPLICITLY AFFIRMS THE APPLICATION OF POWER TO BE NECESSARY, IN ORDER TO THE RESULT.

In the case before us, that power is of God. "No man can come, except the *Father* that hath sent me *draw* him." This language surely speaks of a real power, really exerted. It affirms, also, with equal clearness, that the exertion of this power is so absolutely necessary, that without it the desired effect may not be anticipated. Without it, there will be no coming to Christ, no change. no salvation—*No man can come, unless thus by God enabled.* This same truth, under other figures of

the new birth, quickening into spiritual life, enlightening, &c., all essential to, and coincident with, this coming to Christ, is frequently and distinctly set forth in the Bible, and that, too, by different inspired writers. Thus the language of the apostle Peter, *God*, according to His abundant mercy, *hath begotten* us again. 1 Pet. i. 3. Of John, Which were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of *God*. Jno. i. 13. Of James, Of His own will begat He us. Jas. i. 18. And of Paul, But *God* who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sin, *hath quickened* us together with Christ. Eph. ii. 4, 5.

So that here are four different inspired apostles who agree in declaring the conversion, or change of the sinner, to be the work of God. According to them all, the sinner's being "begotten," "born again," "quickened together with Christ," is ascribed, without qualification or limit, to God Himself.

If any difference is to be noted, it consists rather in this—that the language of our Lord, more strongly than that of his apostles, affirms the truth which we now consider. They all clearly teach us, that God is the author of the change from a state of spiritual insensibility and death. But Christ Himself declares, that *God alone* can be the author of such change. No man *can* come, *except the Father draw him*.

Notice, too, how universal and complete this

divine operation. By nature, all are said to be without understanding: Rom. iii. 11, but, in the spiritual change, it is *the same God* who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that *shines* into the heart, *to give the light of the knowledge* of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Cor. iv. 6. By nature, our *wills* and *practices* are opposed to God. The heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil. Eccl. viii. 11. Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life. Jno. v. 40. But, in this spiritual change, it is God who works in us, to will and to do of His good pleasure. Phil. ii. 13.

So, also, we are naturally opposed to God in our *affections*. The carnal mind is enmity against God. Rom. viii. 7. But, in this spiritual change, it is the Lord God who circumcises the heart, to love the Lord our God with all the soul, that we may live. Deut. xxx. 6.

In view of these passages, how can any for a moment doubt, that this operation of God, in order to renew the man, is universal and entire? For if, as we thus are plainly taught, it is from Him that this new understanding, new will, new affections, and new actions are derived; then, verily, the new man must be wholly the work of God. Upon Him, therefore, we must wholly depend for its performance, or wholly fail of the needful result.

And here let the reader pause to reflect, if

there is any thing peculiarly strange or remarkable in this truth, as applied to the conversion of a sinner. Who pretends to deny, that the upright and holy walk of all or any *after* conversion, is entirely the result of the Spirit and grace of God? Does not every child of God feel, that if he at all promotes the divine glory, and follows the road that leads to heaven, it will be because the Spirit of God upholds, sanctifies, and guides him? Who of the godly does not feel concerning that Spirit—

“He is the source of every grace,
Of light, and life, and holiness?”

Who of that number does not daily pray,

“By Him alone may I be taught,
And all my works in Him be wrought?”

Where is the professor of religion that would have the daring, to stake his security upon any other than this divine assistance—being kept by the power of God unto salvation? 1 Pet. i. 5. And this feeling, thus manifested, most fully accords with Scripture. The holy men whose lives are there recorded and dwelt upon, how freely they acknowledge this! Thus the great apostle, so distinguished for his piety and his zeal, is heard to say, Not that we are sufficient *of ourselves* to think any thing. 2 Cor. iii. 5. Mark the expression! Insufficient *to think* any thing as of ourselves: but *our sufficiency is of God*.

Hereby he clearly acknowledges the assistance of God to be essential, if he is able to entertain right thoughts even. As to his zeal and success in the work of the gospel he says, that *God* had made him and his fellow labourers, able ministers of the New Testament. 2 Cor. iii. 5. And, again, I laboured more abundantly than they all : yet *not I, but the grace of God* which was with me. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

The pious David, also, acknowledges this dependence ; and that the Source to which he looks for help is the same with that of Paul. For, it is to *God* he prays, when longing for a clean heart and a right spirit. Ps. li. 10, 12. It is the joys of *God's salvation*, that he seeks ; and by *God's Spirit* he pleads to be upheld.

If then the people of God—those who have been born again, and are truly heirs of happiness and life—are continually constrained to feel and acknowledge their dependence, in order to the maintenance of this new life and new relation, what marvel when we are taught, that this same godlike power is necessary, in order to imparting the life, and constituting the relation? Surely, not more power is requisite to sustain life, than to originate it. Not more is required to hold the breath of a man, and deal it out at each heaving of the lungs, than to create the man with faculties for receiving and using that breath. The Bible teaches, that the same God makes the man and holds the breath. Neither, again, can

more power be required to sustain a child of God, than from his death of trespasses and sins, to quicken him into life, and constitute him a child. The Bible teaches, that the same God, by His Spirit, both quickens and sustains.

Hence, when we sometimes behold men, who, under the sound of the gospel, had long appeared as motionless and dry as the bones of Ezekiel's vision, through the instrumentality of the very same truths moved, inquiring, saved, we properly infer that it is because this divine power has been exerted. Never, until its exertion, will such an effect be produced. Our Saviour affirms that it cannot be. Without it, *no man can come*. This teaching clearly shows us, *to whom we are to look* for saving help, and *to whom all the praise* of our salvation entirely belongs.

SECT. 3. THIS DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPENDENCE ON
GOD, IS NO LESS APPLICABLE TO TEMPORAL,
THAN TO SPIRITUAL AFFAIRS.

In the preceding sections I have set before the reader, in view of his salvation, these ideas of his own inability and entire dependence on God for two reasons :

1. To bring them distinctly before him, as Bible truths, therefore, important, and neither to be denied nor neglected. This goes upon the assumption, that all Bible teaching is of importance to us, and cordially to be welcomed and received.

2. That it may be distinctly understood, that I do not attempt to remove the objection which is derived from the doctrine, by denying the doctrine itself.

This would be to act the part of a "blind guide," and "miserable comforter" indeed. When salvation is the stake, to turn the attention away from the only power that can secure it.

But stopping here, the impenitent reader still might feel and be disposed to say, that thus the change is made to depend entirely upon God—therefore the excuse before us is a valid one.

The premises here most readily may be admitted, but not the conclusion. True, we are taught that no man is, and no man can be brought to Christ—can be saved, without the power of God. But did you never read of other works that men cannot perform, without the assistance of this same power? I greatly fear that you have failed thus to read, or, in reading, have failed to attach equal weight to the language. And I thus fear, because in other concerns, with reference to which your helplessness and entire dependence on God, the Bible with equal clearness and strength affirms, you do not urge the same argument for indifference and inaction. For instance, did you ever find yourself calmly seated, waiting for a house to appear before you—and pleading for this want of effort, that if a house is ever built, God must build it? And yet the Bible does thus teach, "Except the Lord

build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Did you ever know, or could you approve the course of a city, in which the corporation left its streets and gates unguarded by a single sentinel to oppose, or give the alarm of danger—and urging as their excuse for such neglect, that God only can keep the city? And yet, concerning this very case, the Bible expressly asserts, "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

How strong the language, and how explicit the truth which it affirms! In the one case, and in the other, all the efforts of men are wholly without avail, unless the object be owned, favoured, blessed of God; unless, in fact, God does it. And this, not in any garbled meaning, which would destroy the force of language. But it is in such sense and to such degree, as leaves the Scripture true as well as expressive when it says, God builds the house, and God keeps the city.

But the doctrine is not to be confined to these objects alone. The house and city are here specified, in order to make more definite and clear the great truth which the passage is designed to teach. What truth? That *in all the business of life*, men are at the same time utterly helpless in themselves, and *wholly dependent on God*.

So that, what you claim as a warrant for inaction in spiritual affairs is not, in the least possible degree, more decisive and clear, than that

afforded touching any and every worldly interest. In *both cases*, the Scripture teaching is precisely the same—namely, the total helplessness of man, and his absolute need of aid from God's almighty power. And it were just as wise—just as consistent with hope for desirable results—to plead this absolute dependence and do nothing, when any worldly interest or pursuit is presented, as to plead and act thus, when the service of God and the welfare of the soul, is the matter urged upon your regard.

Still, however, often do we hear the plea, resolutely offered, as though a valid reason for inaction in the latter case—while it is never thus spoken of and applied in the former.

SECT. 4. THE PROBABLE REASON WHY THIS INABILITY
IS MORE URGED IN SPIRITUAL THAN IN
TEMPORAL AFFAIRS.

In the preceding statements, the following remarkable anomaly has appeared. The very same inspired book, in reference to the very same individuals, teaches the same identical truth, as equally applicable to their case in all circumstances and pursuits. And yet, laboriously and anxiously toiling in affairs of this life, the application of that truth is almost entirely forgotten or disregarded—while in reference to spiritual affairs, it is eagerly seized as sufficient reason for doing nothing. Why this is the case,

each, thus treating Divine truth, should very seriously inquire, and endeavour candidly to answer.

A varied answer might be given. But, for the present, I may assign the following, as a true and sufficient explanation of this different use, and consequent abuse of revealed truth. In ordinary worldly affairs, the affections and desires of men are enlisted; while, in reference to spiritual and future interests, they are in a state either of entire insensibility to Divine things, or of strong and positive hatred.

Now every thing in that religion which secures the salvation of the soul, is more or less directly and necessarily connected with the service of God and yielding obedience to His holy law. That is, it brings thus into connection with the same Being and same government in reference to which the Bible says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

This, indeed, might sufficiently explain why any thing, having only the *shadow of plausibility*, should be seized and urged as an excuse for neglecting salvation, if the necessary conditions of receiving it must bring each into the service of God and obedience to his law.

The natural man hates them both—is enmity against them: and hatred always tends to separation and neglect at least, if not to actual opposition from him in whom it reigns. Hence, it is not surprising to find persons already predisposed

by their own feelings of hatred, when conscience or pious entreaty is demanding prompt attention to personal salvation, laying hold of the idea that they *cannot*. Evidently the *semblance* of that plea is furnished by the Bible. And thus, even without pausing to consider, whether what they offer is *really the* reason, they succeed in excusing themselves from all effort for the divine glory, and salvation of their own souls.

But the feelings of the unregenerate are not fully described, when spoken of as alienated from God. The Bible regards and speaks of them, "As men of the world, who have their portion in this life." Ps. xvii. 14. And all experience testifies that they are so of this world and have their portion here, that their plans and efforts, joys and griefs, are for the most part limited by the present. Behold an unrenewed man in sorrow, and listen if the reason which he assigns, is not failure in some possessed or hoped for worldly good. See him joyful, and witness if that which inspires his joy, is not altogether of an earthly nature. View him while planning or making effort, and observe how exclusively that which is thus securing his thoughts and energies, pertains to the life that now is. What stronger evidence of supreme affection could be afforded or required than this? According as the world smiles or frowns, completely and constantly to be regulated and controlled, as to one's joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, plans and efforts. Hence, with their hatred

of God, on the one hand—and their strong affection for the world, on the other—we see abundant reason why, in spite of truth, worldly objects are so ardently sought, and spiritual interests so resolutely refused. But the reader will bear in mind that following thus the impulse of passion—and, irrespective of right or wrong, neglecting what you hate, and striving for what you love and desire—while it may and undoubtedly does affect your *conduct* in relation to these affairs, it does not in the least affect the truth in question. It remains a Bible truth still, that if any thing even in matters strictly pertaining to this life, is accomplished among men, and therefore by you, God is literally and truly the Author of it. And, as already noticed, it is a truth not in the least more plainly and strongly taught in reference to your spiritual, than your temporal, most simple, and every day concerns.

But, perhaps, another and equal reason for this difference of conduct, touching spiritual and temporal interests is, that in the business of the world, even impenitent men both admit and act upon an important principle, which in spiritual affairs they leave entirely out of view.

This leads to the third general head which was proposed—the intervention of means between the Power, and the needy, dependent creature.

SECT. 5. THOUGH MAN, EVEN FOR HIS TEMPORAL GOOD, IS SO DEPENDENT ON GOD—YET GOD BLESSES MAN, IN CONNECTION WITH THE DILIGENT USE OF ESTABLISHED AND ACKNOWLEDGED MEANS.

In evidence of this, let the reader turn to the second passage which stands at the head of this chapter. Notice has already been taken of the fact, that whatever it is, in the varied pursuits of life, to which men may turn their attention, that is the object to be gained—but that the power which secures it, is wholly of God. And, so literally is this the case, that if God should not exert His power in furtherance of that object, all human efforts must prove vain and fruitless.

The universal applicability of this truth appears evident, when the building of a house, and the keeping of a city, are the objects cited for illustration. But the peculiar structure of the passage is worthy of notice—"Except the *Lord build* the house, *they* labour in vain *that build* it." Here it will be observed, two classes of builders are distinctly mentioned—The Lord builds; and they, that is men the labourers, build it. And we are no more at liberty to exclude one class of builders, than the other. Neither *can* we make any such exception, without marring the beauty and force of the truth which it is designed to convey. What is that truth? Why,

labour they whosoever, and howsoever long, *if God does not build*, their labour is but *vain*—absolutely, *the house will not be built*. But, at the same time, though God builds or secures the result, it is *while men as builders are laboriously engaged*.

That is, notwithstanding they are so wholly dependent on God, men are required to be *as diligent labourers* for the end designed, *as though all depended upon themselves*. If they are not thus employed, ordinarily God does not, and will not build the house, or keep the city. How direct and clear the inference, therefore, that for the attainment of those ends which men have in view, and are permitted to secure, the careful, persevering exertion of their own mental and physical powers, is an *appointed medium through which* God is pleased to exert His power and communicate His blessings.

A medium, because of this Divine appointment *so essential*, that where it is wanting, men may not even hope for the object to be gained.

Experience, also, unites in the teaching of this and other passages.

On the one hand we universally find, that though the soul of the sluggard desires, he has nothing. Prov. xiii. 4. That drowsiness clothes a man with rags. Prov. xxiii. 21. That if one neglects to plough and sow and cultivate, when harvest comes, he shall beg and have nothing. Prov. xx. 4. That is, if any refuses or fails to put forth effort for the

attainment of any desirable good, though God be its Source and Author, that man may expect most certainly to want.

So when earthly good is possessed, the care and economy of men are called for, if they preserve it. Uniformly wastefulness, in excessive self-indulgence, shows a loss, and presently *a want* of life's ordinary comforts. God does not preserve treasures, or worldly support, in opposition to this law. The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty. Prov. xxiii. 21. By means of a whorish woman, a man is brought to a piece of bread. Prov. vi. 26.

On the other hand we see, that it is only the man who tilleth his land, who has plenty of bread. Prov. xii. 11. That the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. Prov. xiii. 4. That it is the man who is diligent in his business who stands before kings—or, attains to positions of honour or trust. Prov. xxii. 29. That is, though worldly advantages come from God, He chooses neither to bestow nor to preserve them, *independently of care and effort* on the part of those who would receive them. This, as a law, experience has fully established. Hence, when men would realize their desires and expectations in matters of this nature, we find that they conform to this unyielding law. And, by a necessity which it imposes, they will plan and toil as if the essential instrumentalities and power were all

at their own command—and the object desired, wholly at their bidding.

In itself considered, such diligence is right—is perfectly consistent with the Divine Word. Yet, so deeply would the same word impress upon us, that all which man can do is an *instrumentality only*, while God is the true and *only efficacious power* in gaining any object, that we have an express warning, and solemn example against a contrary feeling.

Says Moses to ancient Israel, in reference to this very point, *Beware, lest thou say in thy heart, my power and the might of my hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth the power to get wealth.* Deut. viii. 11—18. As elsewhere industry is commanded, it is hereby implied and therefore expected, that they will labour for this wealth. Otherwise, where would be the ground of the caution? Where the shadow of a reason for saying, “My power and the might of my hands hath done it,” if, in reference to such result, they had been totally inactive? And yet, in the very putting forth of the needful effort, how earnestly are they cautioned against harboring the feeling, that after all, the power for securing it is not entirely from God! *He* giveth the power to get wealth—as truly, and without doubt in the same sense, as he gives the power that builds a house or keeps a city.

Notice, too, the case of the king of Babylon.

For a season he was dethroned, driven from among men, and had his dwelling and his food with the beasts of the field. What was his fault? At the end of twelve months, he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that *I* have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of *my* power, and for the honour of *my* majesty." Dan. iv. 29—33. The prominent evil here exhibited is, ascribing to his own power and might the splendor and comfort of his capital. This was that pride of self, and infidelity towards God, that called for the severe chastisement which he suffered. How long was his punishment to be endured? Only until the evil for which it had been sent, should be fully corrected. "Seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that *the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.*" That is, though a king with wealth, and power, and grandeur, and multitudes of men apparently at his command—yet he most grievously offends, when claiming these as absolutely his own, and independently of God Most High.

From all which it is manifestly to be gathered, that while planning and labouring even in the affairs of this life, *any thing short of entire dependence* on God, is not only contrary to a Bible doctrine—but it *is so highly sinful* and displeasing in His sight, as to deserve and loudly to call for punishment at His hands. And the fact that

such multitudes labour with this same self-confidence, without any visible manifestation of the displeasure of God, is no more to be regarded as evidence that they are right, than that multitudes when breaking the Sabbath, or swearing, or stealing, are doing right, if no judgment suddenly overtakes them. On all these points, in common with that before us, by precept and warning, by promise and threatening, God has most plainly stated His mind and purpose. Moreover, at intervals along the history of the world, he has come out in swift displeasure on some, and thereby given warning to others. And it must prove most disastrous to those who infer, that because His judgments are hid, the thing *once* forbidden and avenged ceases to be wrong. Abundantly are we taught, that this is not the period for *prompt* and *general* judgment.

But, although God is thus jealous of His honour, and will not give His glory to another—and though the efforts of men, in themselves, are unavailing, and at best are but means—yet, so important are they as a Divine appointment, that unless these means are employed, the object ordinarily is not, and cannot be secured.

So long as this truth is thus confined to matters of this life, I doubt not that any reader will readily admit it. But I must proceed to show :—

SECT. 6. THAT AS IN TEMPORAL, SO IN SECURING
SPIRITUAL INTERESTS, MEANS ARE TO BE
EMPLOYED.

This is clearly implied in the declaration of our Saviour—for the drawing to which He refers evidently supposes means of communication between God and the creature. By this is meant, that as certainly as in the business of the present life, so certainly as touching the salvation of the soul in the future life, God has appointed *means* through which, and *ordinarily through which alone*, He is pleased to exert His power in saving men, by bringing them to Christ. And these means men can no more neglect with impunity, than those which are appointed for attaining any worldly end they may have in view. In their use, moreover, we are to employ them *with a diligence, zeal, and perseverance*, corresponding to our use of worldly means for worldly ends.

As to what these means severally are, it would protract this section and chapter beyond the length desired, should I fully dwell upon them all. But it falls within my province to show, that there are such authorized instrumentalities—known and spoken of as “*means of grace*”—which every one, hoping for spiritual favours from God, necessarily must expect to employ if his hope is realized. These are the same, so often urged upon professors in the church, who are assured, that to neglect the use of them, must prove the cause of

spiritual darkness, doubt, wandering from duty, and falling into sin. And the reason given is, that, apart from their use, God gives no encouragement to hope for spiritual favours at His hand. But, if they are faithfully and rightly improved, as means only, and with prayerful confidence in Him alone, these blessings may be enjoyed. Precisely thus would we reason with the impenitent also. Use these means, because God has appointed them as the medium, through which He is pleased to communicate His power for drawing the sinner to Christ, and saving his soul. Because, also, those means neglected, we wait in vain for the exertion of that saving power.

Do you ask that I be more explicit? Then you will carefully attend upon the few, out of many, that I may adduce. Says the apostle, It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. 1 Cor. i. 21—24. Here observe, 1. The end proposed is the same with that we now consider—namely, the salvation of the souls of men, or its equivalent, their coming to Christ. Of all human wants, it is that which is supremely desirable. Observe, 2. Who it is that secures this salvation, to every soul that possesses it. In accordance with, and therefore additional proof of, the teaching in a previous section, the passage cited affirms that it is God who saves. But, 3. Does God thus save, apart from, independently of, or in opposition to means appointed

and known for this purpose? Whatever God *might possibly* do in any particular case, the passage cited gives *not the least encouragement* to expect salvation at His hands, apart from a clearly appointed method for the purpose. It pleased God, *by the foolishness of preaching*, to save. That is, the preaching of the gospel—though in the estimation of the worldly and unbelieving it be but foolishness—is, nevertheless, that which God is pleased to employ for bringing men to Christ and heaven. Mark! how explicit! God saves by the preaching of the gospel. A *regular, devout, and earnest* attendance upon the preached gospel is here urged, therefore, by other reason than the command, “Reverence my sanctuary”—“Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.” It is to us a channel, chosen and prepared, appointed and revealed by God Himself, for the descent of spiritual blessings, and the communication of that power which alone can bring to Christ and endless life.

Besides attention to the preaching of the gospel, we are also faithfully, by reading and meditation, to use the written word. Our Saviour in praying to his Father offers this petition, Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. Jno. xvii. 17. Sanctification is holiness. And as holiness is that, without which no man shall see the Lord, it is in fact salvation that He asks for those, on whose behalf He prays. Heb. xii. 14. At the same time, by asking the Father to

perform it, He teaches, that to secure this holiness in order to this salvation, *is the work of God*. But how does God Himself effect it? Is it with or without means? On this point, the language of our Lord is most clear and instructive—"Sanctify them *through thy truth*." That is, the truth of the Divine word is an additional instrumentality, through which, when employed, we may hope that God will bestow the blessings of his grace. The nature of the case might lead us to infer, that *our part is*, to strive after acquaintance with that word. But hear the direction of Christ himself, to those who desired and anticipated eternal life. *Search the Scriptures*. Jno. v. 40. So the apostle tells us, that *knowing* the Scriptures is essential to being made wise unto salvation, *through faith* which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. So that faith is to be desired and sought. But what connection is there between faith and the sacred word? Of the Bereans it is recorded, *therefore* many of them believed. Acts xvii. 11, 12. Why? Not only because they attended upon the word preached—but because they *daily searched* and compared the preaching itself with *the written word*.

I may here pause to say, that the part which the word, both read and preached, is designed as an instrumentality to perform, is *to enlighten the mind* in the knowledge of God and of His saving truth. And this, in order to our becoming possessed of all the gospel graces, and brought into confor-

mity to the Divine will. Without *faith* it is impossible to please God, Heb. xi. 6,—but faith cometh by hearing the word. Rom. x. 17. God commandeth all men, every where, to *repent*, Acts xvii. 30,—but it is only such views of our standing in the sight of God, as His word presents that can cause any to be pricked in the heart and cry out, What shall we do? Acts ii. 37. God is setting forth His Son as a propitiation and only ground of hope—but, for this very reason, we are urged to betake ourselves to His sacred revelation. Search the Scriptures; for these are they which testify of Christ. Jno. v. 39. Naturally we are surrounded by spiritual darkness, and greatly exposed to doctrines that are false—but in the Scriptures, we have a sure word of prophecy, a light shining in a dark place, taking heed to which, and we shall do well. 2 Pet. i. 19. And when any would instruct and guide, the duty of each who hears is, by going to the law and the testimony, to see if they speak according to that word. Isa. viii. 20. God is demanding, that as His servants, we should yield up our members as instruments of righteousness unto Him, Rom. vi. 13,—but to guide our service, He has given us His word, that we may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work, 2 Tim. iii. 15—17; that we may have a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Ps. cxix. 105.

In short, whatever be the view of our relation to God, and whatever the feeling and duty be

requires, we find this Word calculated and designed, as an instrument in the hands of the Spirit, to secure the desired result. Eph. vi. 17.

Whether it be doctrine, reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness that we need, for each and every purpose and at all times, God's inspired word is profitable. And so essential is it, so highly above all His name does God magnify that word, that ordinarily from the one who slights it—and so long as he slights it—does God withhold those blessings of His grace which it makes known, which sinful men do need, and which are indispensable in order to salvation.

Again, by his prophet, God says, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Says our Saviour, How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him! Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth. Lu. xi. 10, 13. Here, as before, we have plainly implied both our need and dependence. But, at the same time, comes to view that other truth which now engages us, that the needy, helpless man may hope to receive from God upon whom he depends, only by a Divinely appointed medium. What is that medium? In order to granting any good, especially the gift of His Spirit, God will be inquired of by those who desire or need it—those who expect to receive, must ask Him for it. In short, for blessings at the hand of God, *men must pray.*

We need not attempt to philosophize upon the connection between prayer to God, and His bestowment of any favour. All that is necessary to be known, is His prescribed plan and settled purpose, touching the course we are to pursue.

He absolutely holds the blessing, deprived of which man must be forever miserable—especially when the blessing specified is the Holy Spirit, unchanged by whom, and none can see the kingdom of God, Jno. iii. 5 ; and then both for warning and encouragement, says to all who would possess and enjoy that heavenly aid, “I will be inquired of.” “Ask, and it shall be given you.” You may speculate upon the fact, that prayer can neither inform God concerning your circumstances, nor assist Him in imparting the blessing. This may serve as mere speculation, and, in itself, undoubtedly is true. Still, if on this or any other account you fail to pray, when God has commanded prayer and promised assistance and favour only in answer to it, *by reason of that neglect alone*, you are left *without the least warrant to hope* for His smile and blessing. And probabilities all favour the belief, that so long as this neglect continues, that smile and blessing will not be received by you.

In all God’s word no ground appears for the belief, that any soul was ever saved that did not pray. Before the spiritual sight is given, and the Holy Spirit in full measure bestowed, in each

case it becomes a historical truth, Behold he prayeth. Acts ix. 11.

Even though God's favour be wickedly disregarded, and prayer restrained until the very close of life—yet then, if the desire and hope turn to heaven, and God in His wondrous compassion, [See Chap. I. Sect. 6,] at such an hour should notice him, it will be in answer to a prayer, kindred to that of the dying thief, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom. Luke xxiii. 42. So that I may safely enumerate *prayer* as one of the means to be employed—a medium so established and important that, so long as you neglect it, you can have *no consistent and reasonable hope* of God's salvation being bestowed.

I need not specify other means to be used. If you *candidly, anxiously, and faithfully* employ those mentioned, you will surely gain all necessary knowledge on these and other points; if any will *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Jno. vii. 17. And if you will not thus employ the few, it were idle to hope that a greater number in the form of duties, though means for securing grace and eternal salvation, would engage your serious thought and action.

Enough has been shown, to accomplish the object of this section. What is that object? To show that God in His word has made known certain duties, as means to be employed by men in the work of their salvation—has spoken of and

promised His saving blessing, in connection with the performance of those duties—*but never apart from them*. So that, though they are helpless and He must draw them to the only Saviour, it is through these means of His appointment, that they *must* look for him to operate. And yet, in no instance is the language or connection such, as either to teach or fairly imply, that the man himself performs the needful and saving work. However diligent and laborious man may be in reading or hearing the word, in prayer, or in the performance of any other service made known as a means of grace, the saving result is uniformly ascribed to God.

But the reader will observe that this is precisely what, in the last section, we found to be the teaching of Scripture, respecting all even the most ordinary engagements of life.

Thus the way appears prepared for the subject of the next section—

SECT. 7. AS TOUCHING YOUR OWN HELPLESSNESS,
YOUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD, AND THE USE
OF MEANS, IN OBTAINING BOTH TEMPORAL
AND SPIRITUAL GOOD, YOUR POSITION IS
PRECISELY THE SAME.

That is, on the one hand, you have no more right to say or feel that you can, of yourself, build a house, raise a crop, or secure wealth, than to say or feel that you are able to save your soul. On the other hand, you have no more warrant in

looking for spiritual safety and happiness, while doing nothing for the purpose—than in anticipating the erection of a house, while no appropriate means are employed. Are you here disposed somewhat to differ—and reply that facts do not fully bear out this theory? What theory and facts? The theory is, that the efforts of men put forth in certain ways, are both appointed and used as means for conveying blessings, either temporal or spiritual, from God to men. The facts *supposed* to be against it are, that in striving after temporal interests we see so many succeed, while in reference to the spiritual so many fail. Therefore, that the same theory or principle cannot be equally applicable to both.

It has been already shown *from Scripture*, that the same theory or principle *is* equally applicable to both—and with this testimony, we should remain satisfied. But I am anxious that the reader should feel how strictly it applies—how constantly and properly you are called upon to act—and yet, as to success, are helpless and wholly dependent on God. Let us then examine the case in several aspects, as an objector would naturally suggest.

1. I need not stop to convince you of the connection in worldly matters, between human efforts as means, and the end desired. This already, in the present chapter, has sufficiently engaged us. [See Sect. 5.] All see, know, and admit, that indifference and inaction here, are

certainly followed by want of the object, however desirable it may be.

At the same time, there are some things which they readily acknowledge they cannot do—for instance, to cause grass, or grain, or irrational animals either to live or thrive—though, in a great measure, to prosperity in these identical forms they may be looking forward for support and comfort.

The Bible throughout, as we have seen, only generalizes this concession, and *applies it to every thing*—building, guarding a city, or in any method seeking to gain or secure wealth or earthly good. It is affirmed, however, as the point of the objection, that men generally succeed in such matters by these means. Hence, it is reasonable to regard these efforts as the means appointed for attaining the end desired, and equally unreasonable to think of success without them. The intimation here is important, bearing on the case in hand, and therefore deserves briefly to be examined.

Candidly ask yourself, *while the law is unyielding*, concerning the use of means in order to even temporal good—does not *failure so often attend their use*, as to prove conclusively that the result is not at human bidding, or within human power? And it does not destroy the force of this inquiry, though we say that the spiritual being more important than the temporal, God disappoints in the latter, to impress us the more with our essential

need of the former. Even though, at times, the result might indicate that to be His definite object—yet the fact of disappointing when He sees best, shows His absolute control.

And is it not true in your own case, and have you not often witnessed it in others, that many plans, though carefully laid, have yet failed of completion, or of securing the end desired? How many days and even years, have efforts been diligently and laboriously put forth for some worldly good, which never came into the possession of him who thus had toiled? How many have striven for the erection of a house, but for some reason, wholly beyond their forecast or control, have entirely failed? With what vigilance many a city has been watched, and yet its quiet and safety been fearfully disturbed? How careful the plans, how vigorous the efforts in order to wealth, and yet that wealth by many such was never secured? How many, apparently most deserving, and with strong reasons for anticipating success, have longed and striven for places of trust and power, and yet, at the very moment of highest hope, have been disappointed?

Indeed, where is the profession or pursuit, that has not had sorely disappointed votaries? Disappointed—not because the individuals were not eagerly desirous, and, with careful plans and toil, did not put forth corresponding and well adapted effort to secure them—but simply, because, notwithstanding all, God in His provi-

dence and for sufficient reasons, did not accompany their use of means by His efficient and essential blessing.

It must result from want of observation, reflection, or sincerity, when any either feel or affirm, that in temporal affairs ordinary means *universally* succeed. The ten thousand instances of heart burnings and heart breakings, of sadness and of tears, strongly testify, that in ten thousand instances *daily they do fail*. Hence, all argument or inference, based upon their un-failing success, must be delusive. But, this occasional or frequent failure notwithstanding, none would be disposed to argue thence, that the use of means is vain. All know, and for the most part act upon the knowledge, that he who utterly neglects them, must expect *always and certainly* to be left destitute. Their success in some or many cases, is altogether owing to the blessing and favour of God. The fact that at any time they fail, becomes new proof, that God being absolute and independent in His control, sometimes, for wise and sufficient reasons, known certainly to Himself even though hidden from others, sees best to thwart them from the end designed. Hence arises the commonly acknowledged fact, that in commencing the use of even lawful and necessary means for attaining any earthly object, no man is able positively to affirm what result shall follow. *Of this only can he be certain*, that without the means, the realization of his desires

cannot reasonably be anticipated. Therefore, he will diligently and earnestly employ them.

Now this last particular, more especially, is what is affirmed and now urged in spiritual matters, and wherein the similarity of the case, as touching temporal and spiritual, most strikingly appears. Note well this point of similarity. That for securing spiritual as well as temporal good, God is pleased to operate through means, which so often as his favour and blessing attend them, result in the hoped for good. And as a *peculiar encouragement* in regard to the *spiritual*, if in "the accepted time," truly, sincerely, earnestly, and perseveringly the means are employed, they *always* receive His favour and blessing and secure the desired result. He never said to the seed of Jacob—nor to any of the race—seek ye me in vain. Isa. xlv. 19.

But, though He is so independent, that after the utmost that man can do, the efficiency or fruitlessness of means is wholly at his disposal—yet, without the use of the means which He has appointed and made known, as no temporal so no spiritual good may be expected. That is, it will be in vain for any thus to hope for faith and repentance, which shall be followed by pardon and eternal life. This does and always will hold good, even in the case of the reader.

Were you to compare the two classes of interests, throughout, in the aspect now contemplated, you would find that what is true of one, is true

of the other also. Then why should not the same truth, in the same circumstances, and in connection with the same individual, be followed by the same result? That is, if you really can say and feel, that with you this inability and dependence present a practical difficulty in spiritual matters, what can lessen the same difficulty in relation to temporal? And, on the other hand, if you do not regard and plead any such reason for not engaging in the temporal, with what consistency can you so eagerly urge it, as an excuse for not attending to the spiritual? For, if as a difficulty it is a valid excuse in the one case, it is *equally* so in the other. So also, if you find that in one case it does not embarrass you and cripple effort, it presents *quite as little* occasion for embarrassment, and exercises *quite as little* restraining power in the other.

2. If, however, you still persist in palliating your spiritual neglect, by urging this doctrinal plea—permit me seriously to inquire, in what form can you present the argument, in which *the same answer*, for both temporal and spiritual considerations, will not be *equally appropriate*.

When urged to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure”—in other words, to secure your salvation—do you reply, “I cannot?” Then, as the same answer of inability would contain the same truth and the same propriety, why not urge it when called to attend upon any earthly service? As already seen, without God please

and enable you, you cannot effect the latter more than the former. Independently of Him you cannot build a house—associated with a company however great, you cannot keep a city.

If told that the eternal safety of your soul should fill you with the most intense anxiety, do you inquire, Why be concerned, seeing it is God's work to give both grace and glory? Then why give yourself concern about any *worldly* interest, however ardently desired? For, it is no less true, that after all you can either plan or do, if that interest is secured, *God alone must do it.*

When admonished that you could as wisely hope for worldly support and prosperity while doing nothing, as in the same indolent manner to think of future and spiritual welfare, do you answer, that there are well established means to be employed for the securing of present and worldly good? Why not speak thus sensibly and consistently, in reference to your spiritual welfare? In this case also means, no less important and established, call for earnest and careful attention. In this case, also, there are means, the neglect of which renders it just as vain to hope for needed spiritual results, as for the *sluggard* to hope, though he craves the support and wealth of the life that is.

When any has endeavoured to encourage and cheer you by the scriptural thought, that if you “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” your eternal life and happiness will be sure—have you

repelled the endeavour by replying, "Faith is the gift of God?" Granted. But why did you not, at the same time, remember and repeat, that though faith comes from God, it comes from Him by hearing His word? Rom. x. 17.

When exhorted to "break off your sins by righteousness," because, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord"—have you quickly cited, as a Bible truth, that sanctification or making holy is the work of God? Why not cite also, *equally* in accordance with the Bible, that God sanctifies through His truth, which is His word? Jno. xvii. 17.

When you may have been rebuked for your indifference to God, no thankfulness for the past, no supplication for the future—has your ready answer been in harmony with the ancient ungodly, What profit shall I have if I pray unto Him, seeing I can add neither to His knowledge nor His power? Job xxi. 15. True. But if, as we have seen, He has promised to do for us only upon our inquiring of Him, to give only upon the condition of our asking—does it not clearly indicate *presumption* on your part to expect from His hand, while, by prayer, you neither inquire nor ask?

3. And then, again as to *ability* merely to use these Divinely appointed *means*, wherein consists the difference in this ability, whether the aim be for spiritual or temporal benefits?

With what greater consistency can you plead,

I cannot pray, or I cannot read, or hear, or meditate upon the word of God, than you could urge the same concerning this book which you now peruse, or any other book? Attendance on truth, and prayer, and other religious means, is *no less* within your power, than are any of the instrumentalities designed, and needful for the attainment of some worldly end. This the frequent practice of even ungodly men confirms—at times when imminent peril arouses them to a sense of need, and awakens a corresponding and earnest desire.

For notice cases, in which such have found themselves thus exposed, and see if thoughts of inability *then* deterred them from effort to secure spiritual favours—the smile and blessing of God. If, by some sudden calamity he be threatened with speedy death, does he, for a moment, think or speak of himself as unable to call mightily upon God, for deliverance from that death, or for pardoning mercy if he must die?

I am not speaking of the spirituality or value of such petitions—of the certainty or probability even of their being heard and answered—if his praying has been till then postponed. For God's "accepted time," with him, may have already and forever passed. The point at which I aim, is to remind the reader, that in such circumstances and at such a time, the excuse of inability vanishes. Thus situated, I cannot doubt, that you also would find such excuse most promptly to vanish

—and your prayer, too, most earnestly to ascend to God for help and pardon. And are you more unable *now* than you would be in a storm, or in a shipwreck, or exposed to any other mode of sudden death? Surely you know and must confess, that though they may arouse you to a sense of your need, there is nothing in these circumstances to increase your power. Then why will you now delay what must be done, if your happiness is secured, seeing that *in yourself* you will never be more able *than at present*—seeing no promise of Divine assistance to enable you is given, while you neglect the ordinary and established means, through which that assistance comes—and seeing too that *now, but not in the future*, all the Divine aid you need, both to employ the means and to secure a blessing from their use, *is freely offered?*

4. But here some reader may reply, I have read and heard the truth of Scripture, and even prayed, yet my experience gives no encouragement in using such means as these. Are you sure that you used them *as means* to an end, or did you regard their use as the end itself?

Was not the thought of having read your Bible and said your prayers, &c., the ground of your satisfaction and confidence? Being thus satisfied, the thing *at which you aimed* is realized. Hence, your expectations for any thing beyond are all unreasonable and all unfounded, because for nothing beyond did you use these only as

instrumentalities. Still reading the Bible, and offering prayers, and other religious duties, though important means, are neither salvation nor its equivalent. And if you are satisfied with merely performing the former, without aiming at or having particular regard for the latter, you have no reason for disappointment should you fail of the latter. Hitherto this may have been the difficulty in your case.

Or your use of these means has been wanting in *perseverance*—a quality so essential to the attainment of even worldly ends. Though *once* you may have seriously read and heard and prayed, have you *now* ceased all, or at least a part? Have you not long since ceased? Then you have failed in that which is not only an essential requisition in using any means, for any end—perseverance, till the end is accomplished—but a requisition particularly noted in the Bible, as touching the means of grace. Let us *not weary* in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we *faint not*. Gal. vi. 9. If then you have fainted, that is reason enough why you have not reaped. But you may not thence attempt to prove, that even if one should persevere without fainting, he would in like manner also fail to reap, or fail of success. That is to deny the Scripture and to make God a liar. A horrid, hardening, damning sin!

Perhaps your use of means has been sluggish or fitful, *at intervals* only. But this is not con-

sistent with the Divine direction—consequently, is not compliance with the condition of His promise. If it is the word, *daily* searching of the Scriptures is the commended example of the Bereans. Acts xvii. 11. If it is prayer, pray *without ceasing*. 1 Thess. v. 17. If the allusion is summarily to all or any of the means to be employed, *Agonize* to enter in at the strait gate. Luke xiii. 24. *Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure. 2 Pet. i. 10. So that if you have not, like one agonizing, been *diligent* and *uniform* in *daily* efforts, you can therein find sufficient explanation of your failure.

Thus it is possible for your efforts and use of means, in various ways, to be *radically* defective. And if, hitherto, you have failed of success, I hesitate not to affirm, that some such serious defect has characterized your attempts. I thus confidently affirm, for two reasons. 1. God has very positively promised to all who truly and sincerely seek. By that promise He designs to encourage effort, as means to an end. And the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent. 1 Sam. xv. 29. 2. The history of the church proves God's fidelity in this respect, and affords encouraging examples to warrant hope for success, upon the faithful use of appropriate means. Think of the thousands on the day of Pentecost who, while attending upon the preaching of the word, were convicted of their sin and

need, and converted to God and holiness. Acts ii. 37. Think of the jailer and his family, when receiving the truth from the mouth of Paul and Silas, himself and his house believed. Acts xvi. 30—34. So Lydia was attending unto the things which were spoken of Paul, when her heart opened, and she became a member of the gospel church. Acts xvi. 14, 15.

In short, the book of Acts abounds in cases illustrating the truth before us. The same is true of *prayer*. Not more certainly do we have recorded the general promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you," than the particular cases for illustration, of the Publican and the Thief. The one pleads in prayer, God be merciful to me a sinner, and goes down to his house justified. Lu. xviii. 13, 14. The other supplicates, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, and receives the promise of admission into paradise. Lu. xxiii. 42, 43. In these and other instances, while they used the means of God's appointment, He was pleased to communicate the grace they sought, and for the securing of which those means were appointed and employed.

And such is the church's history, still, as to encourage those, and those *only*, to hope, who attend in the manner and spirit already described, upon God's appointed means of grace. And, whatever instances of failure may *seem* to exist, they must be *only apparent* ; for the promise of

success is very positive, and illustrations of its fulfilment are very numerous and clear.

So that the reader's case of present failure, cannot be regarded as an exception to the rule, that the *proper use* of God's appointed means is as truly attended and followed by His blessing in securing spiritual, saving results, as were ever any worldly instrumentalities followed by their appropriate worldly good. Your experience, therefore, does not affect the general argument of this section. Much less is that argument affected if now you have *ceased* the use of the means of grace, or are one who has hitherto lived in the *utter neglect* of those means. But stay—this declaration is too sweeping. It does affect, but it does not *weaken* the argument. Means abandoned, or utterly neglected, and yet the desirable result *not attained*, surely tends rather to *strengthen* the position, that spiritual as any other results, do not come, and are not to be expected, apart from means.

5. If, therefore, the two sets of interests temporal and spiritual, stand in precisely the same relation to this great truth, of man's entire dependence on God—if, to secure the needed help which that dependence implies, God has appointed and operates through means—if, in their own experience, men find those means to be essential in temporal affairs; and, in viewing the Bible for authority, and the Church for illustration, they see the same necessary application of means, in

order to spiritual favours—and if the plea of inability holds just *as truly* in the use of means for temporal as for spiritual good, and yet they do not urge this want of ability in the former case, while they do in the latter—then, from all, the plain inference must be, that the secret of this excuse is *a desire for a subterfuge*. It is a *mere apology* for setting aside unwelcome truths.

It is a *mere pretext* for getting rid of unpleasant duties. By this I mean, it is not offered *sincerely* as the real excuse. Your urging inability, as the reason for neglecting the means of grace, expresses rather your *dislike* of the duty, than the felt existence of any real difficulty. And if your confession were candid, I doubt not that the *practical feeling*, proving so efficient in keeping you from God and His service, is, not that you cannot, but that you will not—that you have *no relish or desire* for those great concerns. Jno. v. 40.

Think, reader, in what a position you thus are placed. As if to secure the help of God, the pardon of sin, the safety of the soul, and an eternal life in heaven, were of so small moment in comparison with worldly good, that while you fail not anxiously to plan and toil for the latter, you at the same time verily strive to invent mere pretexts, seize upon and urge the most *insincere excuses*, for neglecting the former. Persisting thus, how can you think and speak of God and heaven with hope? While thus lightly esteeming His favours, and neglectful of His means for

securing them, can you think it reasonable for one, pursuing a course so trifling and with it all so insincere, to anticipate spiritual kindness and eternal life at His hands? Is it not rather wonderful, that his wrath does not kindle upon you, and speedily thrust you from His presence, and put you beyond hope forever?

Besides, did you ever call to mind how directly the reverse is your use of this doctrine, from the inference which the Bible presents?

There, when told of our entire and absolute dependence on God, we find that very teaching to be the basis of argument, not for indifference and neglect, but for *greater effort on our part* to secure the salvation of the soul. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: *for* it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Phil. ii. 12, 13. So would I earnestly urge you. If your salvation is suspended upon the mighty power of God, enabling you both to *will and to do*, oh! instead of trifling, with fear and trembling, seek that aid. And if He willingly offers that aid to those who desire and seek, as well as need it, instead of saying that you have nothing to do, and neglecting means, begin, oh! begin *now*, in an "accepted time," to work out your salvation. Instead of neglect, give all diligence to make that salvation sure. Instead of indifference, I beseech you take most earnest heed, lest within you there be an evil heart of unbelief, causing you to depart from the

living God—and consequently, from life itself. Instead of longer carelessness in reference to interests so weighty, be afraid, “lest a promise being left of entering into rest, you should seem to come short of it.” Henceforth—

“Be this your one great business here,
With holy trembling, holy fear,
To make your calling sure.”

CHAPTER III.

PLEADING "THE PRAYER OF THE WICKED IS SIN," IS
AN INSUFFICIENT EXCUSE FOR NEGLECTING GOD'S
"ACCEPTED TIME."

Even his prayer shall be abomination. The ploughing of the wicked is sin. Prov. xxviii. 9 ; xxi. 4.

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord. Prov. xv. 8, 9.

THE object now before us, is to prove the proposition placed at the head of this chapter, as announcing its subject. To show that when any would venture, as is sometimes the case, to plead his sinfulness, as a reason for present neglect of religious duty, or the use of any of the means of grace, such reason cannot be fairly and consistently urged. That it no more suffices to exempt from this class of duties or means, than from those which pertain merely to the life that now is, and its most ordinary and necessary pursuits. That it, really, is no more applicable to the former, than to the latter class of duties. Hence, that there must be a great and radical mistake somewhere, on the part of him who urges it.

And, because this mistake, either cherished or

neglected, may be the occasion of the whole of God's "accepted time" passing, without becoming to such individual a day of salvation—because I shall aim clearly to point out that mistake, and guard him against such a catastrophe—and because, in so doing, I shall seek to be guided wholly by the word of God, as the only infallible rule of faith and practice—I ask the reader's careful, candid, and personally applying attention.

SECT. 1. PREPARATORY EXPLANATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.

The ordinary Scripture use of the word "wicked" is, to designate all those who are in a state of nature—that is, all who have not yet experienced the change plainly and emphatically styled, being "born again," and by which in Christ Jesus, they are "new creatures." Hence, they are those still in that state, a change from which, our Saviour taught to be absolutely so essential, that unless it takes place a man can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. Jno. iii. 3, 5. It is in this general and comprehensive sense, that in this chapter the term will be employed. And I doubt not, that this is a sense which will prove satisfactory, even to those who most zealously urge the excuse which we are now about to consider. For, I suppose, they themselves admit, that there is a difference between the persons who offer services acceptable to God, and those who do not—that a change is necessary, in any particular case,

before a man really belongs to the former class—and that the force of this excuse lies in the fact, that they have not experienced that change. The idea which they desire and design to convey is, “I am yet among the wicked—the Bible teaches that the prayer of the wicked is sin—and, therefore, in my present state it is not only useless, but actual sin, for me to attempt any thing in the service of God, or by way of striving to gain admission to that service.” Thence we have their inference, I must first be changed, before I can do any thing acceptable. This is a sufficient concession, that applying the term wicked, to all those who have not experienced a change of heart or nature, will be not only Scriptural, but acceptable to those, for whose spiritual benefit I now attempt to write.

By the “way” of the wicked, I understand the whole course of life. And I believe I am warranted by the Bible when I say, that it includes *all* they think, speak, or do, even in the most common, as truly as in the most important affairs of the present life. To indicate this, Solomon specifies the very *ploughing* of such, as being abominable to God. Prov. xxviii. 9.

This seems to be the sense in which our Saviour, also, employs the identical term, applied to the same class, when He says, Broad is the *way* that leadeth to destruction. Matt. vii. 13.

This way of the wicked—his way in all these

respects, and to whatever, in either thought, word or deed, that way may tend or refer—is declared to be an abomination to the Lord. That is, it is loathsome and hateful in His sight. Although the “way,” thus defined, will include spiritual as well as temporal duties—yet, for convenience and clearness, we will separate the two classes.

First, let us consider those which are temporal or pertaining to this life—ascertaining, if possible, why the wicked man is sinning while thus engaged. This will prepare for showing, that the same conditions warrant the same charge against him, while attending to religious duties. And, thence, the inference, that the same characteristics, with all their consequences, apply equally to both classes of services—excusing from or prompting to, as strongly or as little, in the one case as in the other.

With this object distinctly before the mind, I now proceed to consider two reasons, why the way of the wicked, in the very comprehensive sense that has just been mentioned, is an abomination to the Lord.

SECT. 2. TWO REASONS WHY THE WAY OF THE WICKED,
THUS COMPREHENSIVELY CONSIDERED, IS AN
ABOMINATION TO GOD.

First reason. Every thing done by the unregenerate, is with wrong feelings towards God. In examining this charge, I first remark, that the great leading command of the Bible is, Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy min , and with all thy strength. Mark xii. 30. This not only shows what on the whole is proper, but presents a claim of binding obligation, an authoritative command, obedience to which God regards as absolutely due to Himself. Not only that we love God, but that we love Him above every other object. A love that is to exist and manifest itself, not in emotions, or theory, or sentimentalism, or outward acts alone ; but in all combined, and at all times—with all the powers of heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Does He regard the unchanged man as meeting this obligation ? His own revealed opinion on this point is, The carnal mind is *enmity* against God. Rom. viii. 7. That is, seeing the term carnal or fleshly merely designates those who have not been born again, all the wicked hate God. And, of them all in another place, by His apostle He says, That they are *alienated* and *enemies* in their minds, by wicked works. Col. i. 21.

Now, whatever the unregenerate may think of themselves, such is the estimate which God has formed of them. And surely it furnishes a sufficient explanation, for His looking upon such as abominable. Why ? Because with uniform and settled alienation and enmity toward God, all their actions are performed, all their language is uttered, all their feelings are indulged. The wicked does his

very *ploughing*, with such hostility toward God. By this it is neither affirmed nor meant, that the name, attributes, or service of God, is continually and prominently before the mind. But, merely that all which may be affirmed of them, from the very nature of the case, must necessarily be affirmed of a resolute enemy, in a state of settled hostility. Hence, wherever they may be, and in whatever engaged, according to His own declaration, the omniscient God can behold and regard them, in no other light than that of bitter, obstinate enemies. And, because He has emphatically commanded that *all should love Him*, we see sufficient reason why the way, which is pursued with such feelings of hatred, is pronounced an abomination unto God. For, such feelings, and such disregard of authority, are characteristic of a *rebel* only. And, however a rebel may be employed, he is a rebel still, guilty, offensive, and ill-deserving.

Second reason. This is also strong, and, if possible, aggravates the one just stated. In the sight of God, their feelings toward the *world* are wrong. God has not only commanded that our love be supremely placed upon Himself—but He has just as explicitly forbidden the setting of our affections upon the world. Love not the world, neither the things of the world. 1 Jno. ii. 15. And then He plainly declares, that if we do not obey in this regard, we are disloyal and unfriend-

ly to Himself. Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Isa. iv. 4.

Now, whatever the impenitent reader may think of his or her guilt or impropriety in this respect—however he may attempt to palliate, excuse, or even commend his course—I imagine that none will deny such to be his course. A pathway pursued with very strong interest and affection, for things present and pertaining to this life. So strong as to command his first, most intense, and longest continued thought, his most careful planning, and his most vigorous effort. So strong, that, solely under its influence, he will till his ground by *ploughing*—or, drive employment in his shop—or, eagerly watch for success in trade behind his counter—or, seek some worldly advantage in his office—or, worldly glory, by some marked career. So strong, that worldly success and prosperity awaken his highest joy, while worldly failure and adversity, of all other causes, plunge into deepest grief.

If this be so, and I beseech the reader to examine himself in this regard, then you love the world. If you love the world, you disobey that Scripture which expressly commands you not to love it. If you knowingly violate a command of God, you are a rebel against God Himself. And, by this rebellious course, you bring yourself under the denunciation of that other passage, already cited, declaring that if any be a friend of the world, he is the enemy of God.

And I entreat you to remember, that no palliation or gloss thrown in, to make the innocence of your course appear, can be of the least avail. It is one thing for you to say, what the infinite God might and ought to look upon with approbation and regard with affection. But it is quite a different thing, for that same God to declare what *He will or will not* thus regard. And this purpose, as we have seen, he has clearly and strongly declared concerning a course of worldliness. He has most unequivocally denounced it, and declared the man an enemy who pursues that course. And, seeing that confessedly the impenitent thus are living, additional reason therein appears, why their way should be styled an abomination to the Lord. Whatever they do in that way of supreme worldliness—for the very reason that it is done while running there—it is also and necessarily offensive to Him. In every such case, they are substituting Mammon in the place of God.

But some may be ready to inquire, if there is no exception to this charge. Are the acts of justice and mercy even, which the impenitent perform, and because performed by them, all regarded as offensive and abominable? I answer, I understand the text as making no exception. Even acts of justice and of mercy, performed by a man while in this course of enmity to God and love to the world—in other words, before being born again, are all thus regarded. So long as it is true of him that he is a wicked man, whether *appa-*

rently moral or immoral, whether *outwardly* good or bad, he is still an abomination unto God.

It will be observed that *I am not now advocating*, that it is a matter of indifference whether a man be just or unjust, merciful or hard hearted, sober or intemperate. I cannot advocate this, for it finds no place in the Bible or in my belief. It is not now, however, the inquiry how these opposite courses or practices differ, or why one may be preferable to the other—what may be the beneficial or injurious effects on the individual himself, or on society around, while pursuing one or the other course. The solitary point now before us is, Does an impenitent or unchanged, that is a “wicked” man, upon his commencing, or while pursuing a course of apparent rectitude, cease to be an abomination to the Lord? According to the broad understanding of the word “way” already noticed, the answer evidently must be, that he does not. Why such do not form an exception, two reasons may be assigned—and the consideration of these shall engage us in the next section.

SECT. 3. TWO REASONS WHY THE WAY OF THE WICKED
DOES NOT CEASE TO BE AN ABOMINATION TO
THE LORD, HOWEVER CORRECT IT MAY AP-
PEAR UNTO MEN.

First. The excellence of outward conduct, depends upon the motive which prompts to it. I need not dwell upon the adoption and operation

of this principle, as far as practicable, among men. But that it gauges the Divine decisions, which now chiefly concerns us, may be inferred from such a declaration as the following: Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart. 1 Sam. xvi. 7. The plain teaching of this and kindred passages is, that the very same action, in the very same individual, may appear differently to man and to God. Why? Because God sees what man cannot see, the heart—that is, the motives which originate the action.

In another passage we are taught what the state of heart or motive must be, in order that an action prove acceptable to God—Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. x. 31. That is, God's will, by whatever means and so far as made known to us, must be our reason for doing or not doing. Why? Because the execution of His own will by Himself and others, is that which promotes His honour and glory. Hence in each case, Will it please and honour Him, if I thus act or refrain from acting? should ever be the understood or open inquiry.

As the learned commentator, McKnight, says on this passage—"By this precept the apostle hath taught us, that our greatest duty is to promote the glory of God, by regulating all our actions according to His will; that in many par-

ticular actions, we ought to have God's glory *actually* in view, and in *all the rest habitually*; and that *by none of our actions* we should dishonour God, either by committing sin ourselves, or by leading our weak brethren into sin."

There are many Bible illustrations, showing how possible it is for actions apparently plausible and right, because of the state of heart with which they are performed, to be by God condemned. Simon the Sorcerer offered a proper prayer, in itself considered, when he asked for the gift of the Holy Ghost. But upon his offering it, he is not only refused, but told by the inspired Apostle, that he is in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. Acts viii. 18—23. Why? 'The reason assigned is, I perceive that thy heart is not right in the sight of God. In thus speaking of his petition, as proceeding from a wrong state of heart, he means to indicate that wrong motives prompted the prayer.

So in the case of the Assyrian king. Isa. x. 5—13. God had threatened the nation of Israel with overthrow and captivity, on account of their idolatry. Moreover, He had specifically selected that very king, as the instrument of his righteous displeasure, in executing his threatened vengeance. And yet, when the king thus selected had accomplished the Divine purpose, for the very service then rendered, God declared that he himself should be punished. And why? Note, how explicit and definite the reason as-

signed. "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." That is, although the act, carrying out the design and threatening of God, was apparently good—yet because the heart of this king, so far from desiring and seeking the glory of God by what he did, *sought only self*, his course was abominable to God, and he to be punished for pursuing it.

And here may safely be hazarded the assertion, that all, even the apparently best acts of the impenitent, are quite as far from having the will of God and His approbation to prompt and control them—and thus the glory of God as their aim—as was the prayer of Simon, or the punishing of Israel by the Assyrian king. And as in these cases, because not thus prompted and controlled, so in those and all other cases where this objection exists, the act, be it what it may and performed by whomsoever, is an abomination upon which God cannot smile. And neglect of Him, is sufficient reason for such withholding of His favour. Hence, because this objection exists in connection with all the acts of the unrenewed, no one of those acts, however fair to human view, can be other than offensive to God and by Him rejected. Who could reasonably anticipate any other result? The course pursued is in direct violation of a specified and positive law, enjoining the glory of God as the constant aim, in all human plans and efforts. At the same time,

however right the act in itself, the all-glorious God is treated with contempt, either by forgetfulness or neglect.

But here, perhaps, one not professing godliness may be ready to reply, that in his actions he is not always unmindful of God. Indeed, while engaged in the goings, associations, and business of life, he often thinks of God and desires His approval. This leads us to consider the second of the reasons to which this section is devoted.

Second. No act or course of life, however excellent in itself, can be accepted of God, while Christ and His work are rejected. To have this plainly and practically presented, let it be put to the reader in the form of an inquiry. After all you are doing or expect to do, in order to your final acceptance before God, are you relying upon those personal efforts, or upon the vicarious work of Christ? Either Christ is, or He is not, the foundation of your hope. If He is, then you are not among the impenitent for whom these lines are especially intended. Because, it is the fact of rejecting Christ as the only Saviour and ground of hope, which, under the gospel, still retains the charge of impenitence. So soon as a man accepts of Christ, he *is in reality* a godly man; when he professes that acceptance, he *professes* to be a godly man. He is one, whose safety the Bible admits, when speaking of the *true foundation* of human hopes. Other founda-

tion can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. iii. 11. Upon this some are actually building hope of acceptance before God, and of eternal life. To them, to them all, assurances are given of admission to God's favour and final welcome to His kingdom. And what is true, and at the same time peculiar of them is, that although to the view of others their lives may seem perfectly correct, they are never found referring to the acts of those lives, *as a reason why they hope* for God's favour. This is equally the case, whatever those acts may be, however excellent in themselves, however useful to others. So far from any such reference or feeling, with one voice their language is, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. Titus iii. 5.

“ The best obedience of their hands,
Dares not appear before God's throne.”

If, at any time, they are heard to make reference to those works of theirs, it is only by way of *evidence* that they are building on Christ, and may hope to be saved by Him. This is on the principle that

“ Faith must *obey* her Father's will,
As well as trust his grace.”

Such a reference does not set aside Christ; it does not destroy the great and only Foundation—for, after all their services and duties performed,

these souls repose their interests, their eternal interests, upon Him alone.

But is it so with the impenitent? If among that number, is it so with you, my reader? Or is it not a truth, that though some of the acts of your life—if you please so to regard it, most of the acts of your life—are apparently useful and right, these, rather than Christ and His mediatorial work, are the source of your hope and comfort? If pointed to Christ as the elect and sure Foundation laid in Zion, do you not uniformly find the tendency of your heart to be, quickly to refer to your life in the past—not as evidence that you are receiving Christ and truly resting on Him, as your Saviour—but *for proof* that you need no such Saviour? Is it not true, that an upright and tender course of life in the past and present, *itself* forms the only support of your hopes? And if so, is it not to you in the place of every other support, and, therefore, in the place of and supplanting Christ? And then, let me entreat you to notice, how vast the difference here. The *believer* looks to his outward life *as proof* that he is truly on Christ, as on a foundation. *You* look to your life *as the foundation itself*. I assure you, this is a difference not to be disregarded. It is as wide as the heaven is from the earth. If continued to the grave, it shall prove as wide as heaven is from hell.

It seems hardly possible that it should be otherwise, though your life be as correct and

moral as the ancient Pharisees. Indeed, the more correct and moral it is, the greater is your temptation to aggravate this abominable use, which you are disposed to make of it. By so much the more tenaciously, do you cling to it for support and comfort, whenever you think of God and the future.

But while thus depending, it is needful to remember, that you are setting at nought one of the greatest works of God. A salvation originated, planned, executed, and offered by the Godhead. A salvation secured at the expense of the crucifixion of His dear, only begotten, His well beloved Son. A scheme of such concentrated excellence, and so dear to Him, that His whole revelation is made more or less directly to refer to it. Time and again is the allusion to it, as the highest possible exhibition and proof of His most astonishing love to this world—of guilty men. And, for effecting man's salvation, throughout the Sacred Word this is urged upon us, as God's only power and wisdom.

Hence, either proudly to set this at nought, or even to treat it with neglect, must be of all other sins abominable. Heb. ii. 3 ; x. 28, 29. And yet, it is an abomination found at the door of every man, who relies upon what is sometimes styled *morality, instead of Christ*, as the ground of his hope for safety at the last.

And from this charge none, not even what you may regard as your most excellent acts of

life, can possibly be excepted. Your correctness in all your dealings with mankind, your freedom from all the outwardly gross practices of others, your most bountiful gifts of charity, and even your attendance at the sanctuary, reading the Bible and offering prayers, if this is the use you are making of such a life, it is reason enough why God should abhor it, and destroy you.

Now of all that has been said, in this and the preceding section, this is the sum. The unrenewed live and act, with feelings of settled enmity to God, and supreme love to the world. And even those of their number who are leading outwardly correct or moral lives, *before God are radically wrong*, because of the motives which actuate them, and the self confidence which they substitute for faith in Christ.

Such are the reasons which warrant the declaration that their whole way, including alike actions which *in themselves* are either right or wrong, is a way that is an abomination to the Lord. And, with such reasons before the mind, who can wonder that it should be so? The highest excellence in the universe despised—a creature idolized—"the chief end of man" wholly disregarded—and the exceeding riches of God's grace, treated as a thing of nought.

With this view of their "way," let us next consider their "sacrifices" and their "prayer."

SECT. 4. AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE STRONG DECLARATION, "THE SACRIFICE OF THE WICKED IS AN ABOMINATION TO THE LORD,"—SHOWING AN ANALOGY BETWEEN THE TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE CASE.

By the word "sacrifice," is to be understood, all the duties and services of religion. They are thus designated, undoubtedly, because of the great prominence and importance of sacrifices in the worship of the ancient church. Whoever went to the temple to pay his devotions to Israel's God, must uniformly take with him some clean beast or fowl, to be offered in sacrifice by the priest. Hence, in time, the word was so accommodated, as to designate all the religious services which God requires. Thus under the Old Testament the Psalmist says, The *sacrifices* of God are a broken spirit. Ps. li. 17. Under the New Testament the apostle Peter says to believers, Ye are a holy generation, a royal priesthood, to offer up *spiritual sacrifices*. 1 Pet. ii. 9. So, very evidently, it is proper to understand the passage now under consideration. In whatever religious duty the impenitent man may outwardly engage—at church, Bible reading, or even in the form of prayer, he is still abominable.

And, indeed, no apology is needed for this broad construction. For, when the excuse before us is urged, the individual would make a

universal application of it, to all the services peculiarly enjoined by religion. This, in fact, is his direct design. He is urged to make the salvation of his soul the *primary* and *present* object of concern. And, in order to secure it, to give most diligent and earnest heed to those Divinely appointed means, by which he may hope to be drawn to Christ, and through which to receive the blessings of the Spirit—No, is his quick reply, you must necessarily excuse me from that, for the Bible says, “The prayer of the wicked is sin.”

Now, although this is not a correct quotation from the Bible, yet, being substantially its teaching, and as his design in either form of speech would be the same, I am willing to take the impenitent at his word, and dwell for a little upon the word *prayer*, as a representative for every other religious service and duty. I remark, then, that prayer, as any other act or duty, may be offered with different frames both of mind and heart. Moreover, the acceptableness of prayer, just as that of any other act, must depend upon the state of mind and heart at the time of its being offered.

There is one state of heart, which presents the man as an humble, penitent, sincere, fervent, persevering petitioner at the throne of grace—one who, while there, feels that if the object of his desire is ever bestowed, it will be all of mercy in the name of Christ, and all the praise due to

Him who granted it. It is not questioned that such prayer, with all kindred services, so far from being an abomination, is well pleasing to God. It is precisely the kind of prayer, in manner and spirit, which His commands do specify, and to which His promises refer. Upon this, therefore, we need not longer dwell. But there is another state of heart, already noticed, which presents the man, just as he appears in the sight of God while putting forth any other effort. That is, he is one filled with *enmity* to God, *supreme love* to the world, prompted by *other motives* than the Divine glory, and making the very duty which he performs, and not the Lord Jesus Christ, the ground of his hope for acceptance. The existence of one, or the other, or all of these characteristics, is, as we have seen, precisely that which causes him to be denominated a wicked man. Because, where one is reconciled to God and loves Him more than any other object, has His glory for a ruling motive, and places his hope of salvation solely on Jesus Christ, that is a good man, in the acknowledged sense of Scripture. Such, therefore, is not the one whose case is now considered. It is to the man who admits himself to be among the wicked, in the sense already sufficiently explained, and, in that acknowledged character, urges the plea which forms the subject of this chapter, that these lines are now addressed.

Now, as already intimated, if the round of re-

ligious duties be performed with this state of heart, not only must they, as any other, fail of being acceptable, but prove abominable to God.

And who will deny that they may be thus performed, wholly void of God and Christ, and filled with the world and self? That it is possible for a man to sit in the very sanctuary, while his carnal mind is enmity against the God of the sanctuary? That it is possible to be under the sound of the gospel, and yet most resolutely refuse the salvation wrought out by Christ, which that gospel reveals? That it is possible to appear as a worshipper of God, while in reality Mammon is most ardently remembered and worshipped? In honour of Mammon, his plans are laid, his calculations are made, and his business or pleasure otherwise arranged, for the week or even years to come. Is this worshipping God? True, he does not forsake the assembling of the church. This is well as far as it goes. It is compliance with the letter of God's law,—to refuse which, would be aggravated daring. He is also placing himself in the way of the means, which God's Spirit employs for conversion and sanctification. Still, by bringing a divided heart—yea, at times, almost entirely devoting that heart to other objects—practically disdaining alike both the authority and the grace of God, he pollutes even his best observances of religion.

So, evidently, is it with all his services of this

nature. He may perform any one of them, with just this frame of mind—supreme love to the world, the very basis of which is hatred to God. Moreover, if indeed they perform them, these of all other duties they select, as best calculated to commend them to God. How many have no better nor other reason to offer, for anticipating the joys of heaven, than their regularity in attendance at the sanctuary and such like duties, which in an external manner they ordinarily perform! In the whole round of observance, they regard not the Divine glory, and have neither reference to, nor thought of, Christ as the only hope of sinners.

Now if this be the spirit which prevails, is it not as sufficient to vitiate and render abominable these performances, as any other acts or course of life? And, in all cases when these services are rejected, it is because thus vitiated and rendered abominable unto God. But, with such cause for their rejection, they argue nothing against the law which binds to these duties, nor against God's fidelity to His promises, made to those who sincerely and truly offer prayer and worship. So, taught by inspiration, the Psalmist understood this subject—"If I regard *iniquity in my heart*, the Lord will not hear." That is, if we are rejected in our approaches to God and attempts to serve Him, the reason will be, not because we thus attempted or thus approached, but because of our coming with hearts at vari-

ance with Himself, by being in love with sinful and forbidden objects, and uninfluenced by the great aims and motives which ought ever to characterize religious service. So taught our Lord. When addressing the Pharisees, He speaks of them as so strict that they appeared righteous unto men—at the same time styling them hypocrites, and because of their hypocrisy, pronouncing woe after woe upon them.

Religious duties, therefore, stand upon precisely the same footing with other duties, as respects the ground of their acceptableness with God. If performed with wrong feelings, wrong motives, and a wrong and abominable use of the service, they are equally, but no more offensive in the one case than in the other.

SECT. 5. THOSE WHO OFFER THIS EXCUSE FOR NEGLECTING RELIGIOUS DUTIES, IF CONSISTENT, SHOULD, FOR THE VERY SAME REASON, NEGLECT EVERY WORLDLY SERVICE.

I can perceive no fallacy in this statement, or in the process by which this conclusion has been reached. It has been shown that the course of an impenitent man is, for sufficient reasons, offensive to God—and that these same reasons apply, with equal force and strictness, to matters of every day life, as to those duties more strictly styled religious.

If it be true that you, as a “wicked” man, ought not to pray, nor attempt any other reli-

gious duty, because it is offensive to God, the same reason existing, ought to restrain you from every act and service of life. If you can plead conscientious scruples, as a reason for not engaging in the former class of duties, *not less* should your conscience trouble you, when attempting the latter. Hence, if you assign this as a reason for neglect of the former, you not only ought to assign it as the cause for your neglect of the latter; but, as a matter of conscience, be careful uniformly and universally to neglect them.

And it matters not how these latter may appear, whether innocent or indifferent, in your esteem. It is the *character of the individual* performing it, and not the magnitude or quality of the act, which, in this case, is supposed to originate the charge of sin. Following your own course, the Bible must be the standard on the subject. Professedly citing it, you affirm that, should you attempt any religious duty, you would only be sinning against God—for, “the prayer of the wicked is sin.”

Then, if tempted or urged to any *worldly* service, taught by and citing the same Bible, why not make the same reply? You and your course are *no less* abominable and sinful in this latter case, than in the former; for “the *ploughing* of the wicked is sin.”

On the other hand, you would be *no more* abominable, when attempting prayer or other religious service, than if engaged in any mechanical

or mercantile pursuit. For, so long as you remain a "wicked" man, your *whole* "way," as well as your "sacrifice" and "prayer," is abominable to God.

And yet, does the history of the world present a single case, in which this reasoning has been carried out? Did you, my reader, ever thus argue concerning any thing *worldly*, either in the form of business, or of pleasure?

But, perhaps, you reply, that the Bible makes it your duty, to engage in some worldly pursuit. It *commands*, that we be "not slothful in business." It *threatens*, that "the idle soul shall suffer hunger." But, then, equally clear and positive is the same Bible, in urging to religious duty. This appeared in our last chapter. It declares, that men *ought* always to pray, and not to faint. Lu. xviii. 1. It promises that if we ask, it shall be given to us. Lu. xi. 9. It involves a *threatening*, in the declaration, that God will be inquired of to do for us. Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

As duty, therefore, it is quite as universally binding, as is the duty to be engaged in some worldly pursuit of industry. As to consequences, flowing from the two classes of duties, they compare as eternity to time. And yet, against compliance in the former case, *and not in the latter*, the sinfulness of the attempt is urged as a sufficient excuse. With *right* feelings and motives, the duty is just as acceptable in the former case, as in the latter. With *wrong* feel-

ings and motives, the latter is just as abominable as the former. That is, so far as this one argument is concerned, the cases are perfectly parallel.

This very fact throws suspicion upon the excuse, as being a *mere pretence*, in order the more plausibly to escape from that which, in itself, is irksome. The same godless man will turn both mind and hands to any worldly service that pleases him, not shrinking, in the least, at the thought that God is his enemy while thus engaged. But, remind him of his soul to be saved, of God to be served and honoured, and of strictly religious thought and effort, in order to hope for securing either, and then the individual sets up the plea of sin in the sight of God, as a reason for not attending to matters such as these. When an individual never thinks of, or cares for the Divine approval in any of his worldly engagements, *it is very hard to believe*, though he pleads it, that he is troubled with any such scruple, as the reason for his being deterred from a religious life. We must feel that there is something underlying all this, which does not at first appear. And, undoubtedly, there is. It is that "carnal mind at enmity," which would rather stay at a distance and sin under a mask, than by religious duty, to be brought in *too close contact* with this hated God. And hating God and religion is very different, from fear of dishonouring and

offending Him, as a reason for neglecting any act, or course of action.

Another reason for doubting its sincerity, appears from the nature of the excuse. To be thus conscientious, supposes a man to be already and truly a servant of God, whose leading aim and desire are to please Him. And yet, the very force of this excuse lies in the fact, that he is not a servant of God, but a "wicked" person. That he is, therefore, an enemy, and has no desire to please Him. The very highest style of reasoning, for restraining either saint or angel is, that a course or act is displeasing to God. "How can I do this great wickedness, and *sin* against God?" But what cares an unregenerate man for the pleasure of God? That he is totally indifferent to this, appears from his never alluding to or urging it, except when some service of religion is required.

Finally, if thought of sin were so alarming, we very reasonably might expect to see it *evidenced*, in repentance, earnest seeking for pardoning mercy, and careful turning to all the means and provisions, by which such mercy is secured and offered to dying men. And yet, the excuse itself has, for its *very design*, deliverance from being engaged in any, or all of these, though upon their *true, faithful, persevering*, and *believing* use, in God's "accepted time," is staked hope of acceptance and eternal life. And this, not because he has no sins, which make his case thus

urgent and needy. So far from this, it is his *actual sinfulness* which he pleads, as rendering offensive to God the best religious act he could perform. If his state be thus alarming, if so polluted as to defile whatever he may touch, why not urgently and earnestly attend to the propositions of God's grace—offering, most freely, salvation from his danger and defilement? Let the reader answer this for himself. Why act so utterly indifferent to your guilt, except when urged to the means of grace? And, when thus urged, why plead that guilt as an apology for not using the very means, in connection with a timely and proper use of which, God has promised His gracious pardon? Why, on the ground of being a sinner, slight that which is graciously offered to you *because* you are a sinner? Reader, this must be no other than an *insincerity*, which before God, brands you as a hypocrite, and greatly increases your guilt. Every such pretence, only “heaps up wrath.” Such *pretended* regard for God, only *mocks* Him. And bear in mind, too, that all the while of such trifling, God's “accepted time,” the *day*, as well as the means of grace now urged upon you, is passing rapidly away. Oh! be not among the number, who—

“Rather choose in sin to die,
Than turn an ear to mercy's voice.”

It is true, very true, alarmingly true, that you

are a very great sinner. But, what then? Do you not know, that sin places you under *present* wrath, and directly tends to death and hell? Do you not know, that unless *Divinely aided*, you can never be delivered from sin and its tremendous consequences? Do you not know, that attention to your soul, in the scriptural, earnest, persevering use of the means of grace is designed to secure to you, just the aid you need—aid of Jesus, as a Divine Redeemer, aid of the Holy Ghost, as a Divine Purifier from your sin? And do you not know, that these blessings of purity and redemption, are *entirely* in the hand of God, who is able, ready, willing, *now* to bestow them—but, that *His* “accepted time” is rapidly passing—and, that just as rapidly and every hour, your prospects of His favour and of life, are becoming still more dark?

If you know all this, with all your sinfulness, why not *hasten* to Him who alone can pardon it? With all your crimson guilt, why not *hasten* to Him who only can redeem? With all your pollution, why not *hasten* to Him who only and alone can sanctify and cleanse? If with this, or any other apology, you stay away from “the grace of God which brings salvation,” will you, *can* you ever become better? And if you die with the guilt and pollution of sin still upon you, who, *then*, either can or will redeem and cleanse you? And if, *beyond the grave*, you appear unredeemed and uncleansed, how can you escape,

having, in "the accepted time," neglected God's salvation? Heb. ii. 3. Reader, as great and as many as are your sins—so far from being a valid apology for neglect—they present the strongest possible argument, why you need *promptly* to hear and obey, while "the accepted time" continues, and

"The voice of free grace cries, Escape to the mountain."

Oh! will you believe and receive it, as just the truth you need?—

"For Adam's lost race Christ has opened a fountain :
For sin and transgression and every pollution,
His blood flows most freely in streams of salvation."

I entreat you, no longer, by so vain a pretext, to parley, or cavil, or linger. But, without delay, let it be your *prayerful* resolve,

"I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose—
For, if I stay away, I know
I must forever die."

Dear reader, *now* is God's "accepted time." Before that time has passed beyond recall, are you ready to pray, that now He would grant you His salvation? I beseech you,

"Stay not for to-morrow's sun."

CHAPTER IV.

PLEADING GOD'S SOVEREIGN ELECTION, IS AN INSUFFICIENT EXCUSE FOR NEGLECTING GOD'S "ACCEPTED TIME."

"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." Rom. ix. 11. 12.

"Seeing his days are determined, the number of iis months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." Job xiv. 5.

SECT. 1. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IS LITERALLY AND MOST FULLY TRUE.

For the sake of definiteness, and a mutual understanding between the writer and reader, I shall first state the substance of, what is commonly designated, the Calvinistic view of this doctrine. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet, so as thereby, neither is God the *Author* of sin, nor is *violence* offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of *second causes* taken away, but rather *established*. Confession of Faith, chap. 3. sect. 1, 3, 7.

This passage contains the germ of all that is

truly affirmed concerning the doctrine of election, *technically* so called and understood. This election is only the unchangeable and *universal* ordination of God, applied to, and definitely and permanently deciding concerning, angels and men. In accordance with it, some of them "are predestinated unto everlasting life"—while others are "passed by," and "ordained to dishonour and wrath for their sin."

All this, however, so as that God is not the Author of sin ; nor violence offered to the will of these creatures ; nor the *use and necessity* of second causes removed. From this statement of the doctrine, as well as from the heading of this section, the reader will perceive that the answer to his excuse, does not consist in a denial of the doctrine. This may not be, because the doctrine is in accordance with Bible teaching, and, therefore, must be true. If true, the opposite of it must be error—and error never benefited either individuals or the world.

In the first passage at the beginning of this chapter, the apostle adduces an instance of God's dealings, with the family of the patriarch Isaac. But, mark the strength of his language, in reference to those dealings. They were thus determined and carried out, *in order that*, beyond all question, the doctrine before us might be established. He dealt thus with them, spake thus and at such a time concerning them, that the doctrine of election might stand. Thence, verse

15, he enlarges upon the doctrine. In view of this particular case he teaches, that *all* the instances of Divine compassion and mercy, have their origin in the will, that is the sovereign pleasure of God—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Again, verses 17 and 18, he shows that this same truth applies, *with equal force*, to those who are lost—"The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee."—"Whom He will He hardeneth."

Elsewhere, he shows that all who are "predestinated" or elected, are also effectually "called" into His service and favour; are "justified," or pardoned and accepted as righteous; and "glorified," or saved in heaven. Rom. viii. 29, 30. Again, his language is very strong; for he there ascribes it wholly to the election of grace, that there is even *a remnant* found faithful to God, and engaged in His service. Rom. xi. 5—7. And then, how free from ambiguity is his meaning, when most emphatically he asserts, that all who come short are of the non-elect—"The election hath obtained it, *and the rest were blinded.*"

In his other epistles, he dwells less upon this point, yet very clearly avows it. To the Ephesians, i. 4, 5, he thus writes—"According as He *hath chosen* us in Him, before the foundation of the world—Having *predestinated* us unto the

adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, i. 4, he speaks, as though by them the doctrine was familiarly understood—"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

But the apostle Paul is not alone in this teaching. In his first epistle, Peter, i. 2, addressing those to whom he wrote, thus styles them—"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." The apostle John, also, in his first epistle, iv. 19, thus states the truth which the doctrine involves—"We love Him, because He first loved us." This necessarily implies, that the fact of our loving Him at all, is the mere result of His affectionate, and efficient choice of us. Again, 2 Jno. 1, 13, he employs the term, as peculiarly distinguishing those, whom he regards as the people of God—"The elder unto the *elect* lady and her children." "The children of thy *elect* sister greet thee." Finally, we find our Saviour Himself, speaking of God as exercising this right, both in the absolute and independent choice of those, upon whom He will bestow His spiritual favours, and, in His decision concerning those, from whom He will withhold those favours. "*Thou hast hid* these things from the wise and prudent, *and hast revealed* them unto babes—even so, Father, *for so it seemed good in thy sight*. Matt. xi. 25, 26.

Enough has now been cited from the Bible to

establish the point, that the doctrine of election is literally and most fully true. Denying it, therefore, can be neither a legitimate nor profitable mode of answering objections raised against it.

SECT. 2. GOD'S CHOICE IS ALTOGETHER INDEPENDENT OF ANYTHING IN THE INDIVIDUAL ELECTED; EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER HIS CONVERSION, BUT IS WHOLLY AND ABSOLUTELY DEPENDENT ON THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD.

It cannot be founded upon any thing done by the individual *before* conversion, for two reasons.

1. We are taught that it takes place before any actions have been performed. Look at the passage, at the heading of this chapter. In the case of Jacob and Esau, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, the choice of the persons was before their birth—consequently, could not have been in view, either of what they had already done, or, at the time of their choice, were actually engaged in doing. In writing to the Ephesians, as already cited, the apostle affirms the same. His expression is very strong, declaring that the elect are chosen before the foundation of the world. This is usually regarded as equivalent to saying, that this electing purpose is *from eternity*. It certainly dates far enough in the past, to preclude the idea of its taking place, upon the occasion of something already performed,

or actually in the process of performance, by the individual elected.

2. All that a man does before conversion, the Bible declares to be sinful. "The *way* of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord." As shown in the preceding chapter, by the way of the wicked, we are to understand *all that he does*, whether regarded by others as moral or immoral, whether apparently useful or injurious. His whole life, up to that hour, is spent without a single right motive, without a single right feeling towards either God or the world. Consequently, there is nothing, concerning which we could possibly affirm, that it *is*, or *ought to be*, the basis of God's electing love. So far from thus deserving to be chosen, to the relation and privileges of a child of God, all that he does, being sinful and abominable in the sight of God, calls rather for judgment alone.

Neither does this choice originate in the view of what the one elected will do in the future, *or after conversion*. And it is desirable that this be distinctly noticed and understood, because some professedly holding to and advocating this doctrine, have mistaken here.

The writer well remembers to have heard a member of a Presbyterian Church, strenuous in his belief of this truth, striving to free it from its objectionable features. To this end, thus his views were stated—"This election depends upon the fact of God's foreseeing that the individual

chosen will improve the grace to be imparted—and, because of that prospective improvement, chooses him to Himself.

To pause and give this theory a name, one must needs style it, pure Arminianism. It cannot be a true and Bible theory, for the following reasons :

1. A man's doing any thing pleasing to God *itself originates*, as already seen, in God's bestowment of a nature which enables him to enter and perform the Divine service—"It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." When God has thus wrought in him, then, and *not till then*, does the man begin a life of holy service. Hence, most clearly, this service or improving of Divine grace, is the *effect*, not the cause, of one's election to heavenly favour and eternal life. And to say the least, it must be using language with very great impropriety and confusion, while one thing is only the effect of another, still to speak of it, and base arguments upon it, as though it were the cause. Indeed, it is not too strong to pronounce it *absurd*, to speak of an effect, as though the cause. And it is being guilty of precisely that absurdity to affirm, that the prospective holy love and obedience of a man, is the moving cause of God's choosing him. Why? Because there would and could be no such holy love and obedience without that choice. Because, moreover, it is the *desired* and *designed result*, not cause, of

God's choosing any individual, That he should be holy and without blame. Eph. i. 4.

2. The opposite view would make the language of the apostle very illogical. His very object, in citing the case of Jacob and Esau, is to prove, that the choice of any is owing, *absolutely* and *independently*, to the purpose of God. But stating, as he does, that the choice took place before they had done any good or evil, could not tend in the least to establish that point, if at the same time, the good which they afterward were to do, was the moving cause.

For *prospective* good, as truly as that already secured, may influence to a certain choice or act. Hence, in such case, so far from referring that choice absolutely to the purpose of God, as its originating cause, which the apostle decidedly affirms—the *good anticipated*, as service from the person elected, must be regarded as the cause, which the apostle seems carefully to deny.

And here it must be observed, that this view of the passage is not controverted by Eph. i. 4, cited above. There the same apostle adverts to the *end*, as to the *result* to be secured by the choice—namely, a blameless and holy life. And this, too, is an important doctrine of the Bible.

But here he is speaking of that, which *moves to the choice* itself. This he declares to be, the sovereign pleasure and purpose of God. To make this latter appear, he shows that it was totally independent of any thing, in the individ-

ual chosen—and, as proof that it was thus independent, he declares that it took place, before any thing good or bad was done. Yet, how could this possibly tend to establish, or even bear upon his argument, if, nevertheless, the choice was *prompted* by consideration of works or goodness, reserved and treasured in the future? But a conclusion, strictly illogical, can never safely be affirmed of one, who is reasoning under the direction of Divine inspiration. And this latter consideration forbids the thought that the apostle designed any other, than an open and candid use of the language. It is not a mere play upon terms, when he speaks of their having done neither good nor evil.

3. The apostle says very explicitly, that this electing purpose stood “not of works.” This can be true, however, only by having reference to the *future*, as well as the past. For if God’s purpose originated in, or was based upon, what a man in any particular case would hereafter do, how could it be possible that His purpose was not of works? Hence, if we suppose the apostle to mean what he says—and who does not?—personal election, as to its meritorious cause, is not based upon any thing the individual elected *will do*, any more than upon what he has already done. Thus, in this whole matter, *human merit*, whether derived from the past, present, or future, *is wholly excluded*.

The apostle, however, in leading us to the

true cause, not only declares what it is not, but, with equal clearness, what it is. The Divine purpose of election stands, originates and continues to depend, "not of works" in any sense, but wholly "*of him that calleth*"—i. e. God. This elsewhere and frequently is taught. Rom. viii. 28. Eph. i. 5. It is the uniform teaching of all those passages, which speak of God's choosing and calling men, referring their salvation entirely to His purpose and choice. But especial notice should be taken of the language of our Saviour. How explicitly He warrants and teaches this doctrine, when He assigns as the reason of God's favouring and distinguishing choice, *that it seemed good in His sight!* Matt. xi. 25, 26. Enough has now been said, to establish the point of this section—election is, altogether, independent of any thing in the individual himself, and wholly owing to the good and sovereign pleasure of God.

But, in passing, I am constrained to pause upon a thought, not essential to the argument of this chapter. Let the reader note, what a sad reflection is thus cast upon himself, in common with the race. So utterly wretched, that if God looks upon you, and determines to show His favour, the only reason why He thus determines, is to be sought, not in yourself—because *no sufficient reason there exists*—but, simply because He chooses, in kindness and of His good pleasure, to bestow it. All that can be seen in any man, betokens need of compassion, without the least

compensating good to deserve that compassion. So that if it come at all, it comes from God, merely because *it pleases Him graciously* to bestow it. Oh ! how such a view should humble us, and curb our murmuring, while it exalts, in our esteem, this kind, though wholly independent, God. For even from such a race He has actually chosen a multitude, that no man can number. Rev. vii. 9. And, instead of taking such views of this subject, as only harden and tend to ruin the soul, how we should contemplate this Divine kindness, this “exceeding riches of His grace,” till our hearts are melted into tenderness and love !

SECT. 3. SHOWING A STRICT ANALOGY BETWEEN GOD’S
ELECTION OF ANY TO SPIRITUAL AND ETER-
NAL LIFE, AND HIS PURPOSE CONCERNING
PHYSICAL AND TEMPORAL LIFE—BY A BRIEF
EXAMINATION OF JOB XIV. 5.

The language is as follows—“Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.” As bearing upon our present object, note several particulars concerning this passage.

1. It is an allusion simply to physical or natural life. This will be very manifest to any who will carefully read the context. The sacred writer opens the chapter, by reference to the fewness of the days in the life of man. To illus-

trate it, he speaks of them as flourishing, and being cut down, like the flower. And then, plainly and literally, in language which can leave no doubt concerning the meaning of the writer, he says, "Man dieth and wasteth away ; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?"

2. The length of this life, in each case, has been already irrevocably fixed.

"His days are determined"—"Thou hast appointed his bounds, that he cannot pass." If, then, the *boundary* of life is *appointed*, and the *number* of its days and months is fully *determined*, the language must be most strangely employed, if we are not to understand, that when that boundary has been reached, it will end our progress—when that number has been spent, there will be no possibility of increasing it. That it does thus mean, every candid reader must readily admit—from the very nature of a *fixed* boundary, and a *determined* number. But, to acknowledge this to be the meaning and consequent teaching, is to admit that, *whatever* may be *the advantages* of friends, physicians, climate, or local circumstances, none will be able to add even a single day to those which have been already allotted.

We often think, and act upon the feeling, that with tender nursing, skillful physicians, change of air, and faithful application of remedies, we shall certainly recover. And, most assuredly we will recover, *provided* we have *not* arrived at the appointed boundary—have *not* completed the

number of our days or months. But, on the other hand, if we *have* reached that boundary, if the number of our months *has* been fully spent, the employment of all these varied means, however appropriate and excellent, will prove entirely fruitless; for that boundary we “cannot pass”—beyond it, cannot possibly prolong life, or add a single day. The term “*cannot*,” implies a desire and anxiety, use of means and effort to pass; but, at the same time, positively asserts that literally nothing shall be effected. We may reach the appointed limit while in the city or country, in a season of general health or pestilence, among friends or strangers, with or without a physician or medical remedy—all, equally and alike, will prove utterly in vain; for the bounds of life will not, in the least, be extended, the number of the months will not, for a moment, be increased—and *then* we shall surely die, and not live.

3. This fixing the limits of human life, is declared to be the work of God—“*Thou* hast appointed.”

In the third verse of the previous chapter, Job tells us plainly to whom he speaks—“Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God.” And we are to understand him as continuing his speech and reasoning, and as still addressing himself to God, when, in the passage before us, he employs the term “*Thou*.” So that it would be correct, and show more clearly

the reference, to read the clause—" *God* has appointed the bounds, that he cannot pass."

Let the reader notice, therefore, that He whose province it is to elect, or determine who shall be saved—and *so* determines, as we have seen, that the number can be neither increased nor diminished—is the *identical* Being, who appoints the number of the days, in every instance, of human life—and *so* appoints and decides them, that that number is absolutely without the least variation. *So absolutely*, as to place it entirely beyond the power of human desire, or human effort, to produce the least possible change.

4. This appointment by God is wholly independent of men.

That it is altogether independent of their *wishes* or *circumstances*, appears from the use of the term "cannot;" for this shows, that when men have reached God's appointed limit to their lives, they will both *desire* and *strive*, but shall find themselves wholly unable to pass beyond that limit. And by what a large proportion of our race, this truth is most strikingly illustrated! They die, because they *must*—because all their desire, anxiety, and care, cannot longer enable them to live. Think, too, how irrespective this is of character or situation in life. Moral or immoral, industrious or indolent, useful or injurious, rich or poor, royal or peasant, with or without a family, pressed with business or desirous of more—of all alike it is true, that independently of their own

or the desires of others, persons sicken and die—or suddenly, without lingering disease, are called from earth.

It is independent of men in another particular also—"The number of his months is with thee." That is, God so completely reserves to Himself the measure of human life, that *none knows or can know*, what is the time appointed for his continuance here. And all experience shows, that this number is not usually made known to any, until it is just completing. Actually *seeing its boundary*, is the first certain knowledge of the *precise* length of the mortal life allotted to any man.

The thoughts in this section, show God's purpose concerning the length of human life in this world, to be both independent and unchangeable. We are now prepared for certain deductions, which necessarily flow from the teaching of these first three sections.

SECT. 4. THE ANALOGY CONTINUED. IF GOD'S INDEPENDENT AND UNCHANGEABLE PURPOSE INCLUDES MY SAFETY—WHETHER IN THE FUTURE OR PRESENT LIFE—I SHALL CERTAINLY BE SAFE.

I have chosen this strong language, because, so far as it relates to the future, it is the same so often employed by the impenitent, for excusing inaction and lulling conscience—and, because I have not the least doubt of the truth of the state-

ment. We will first consider it, in reference to the spiritual and future life. And I beseech the reader to distinguish and notice the true import of this statement. It is, in fact, but a declaration, that if God sets His love upon and chooses you, there is *no power* that can possibly prevent His securing the object of that choice, and, consequently, the salvation of your soul. That is, God, superior to and uncontrolled by any other, can and will, in every case, certainly perform His purpose.

This He directly claims—and any thing short of it, would greatly derogate from his exalted nature. My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure, Isa. xlv. 10, surely is language very decided and strong. And the evident view of God which it presents, is that of one who not only can plan, but execute, as He pleases, wholly independent of every other being, and every other world. Hence, in the execution of that purpose, He must be wholly unrestrained by any individual of the human family, towards whom that purpose might be directed. Consequently, dear reader, nothing that you can do will be able to thwart the final accomplishment of His purpose electing you to salvation—*provided*, He has thus purposed concerning you.

This is the leading point of the present section. A point, therefore, wholly different from the teaching, that God is totally unmindful of, or indifferent to, the nature and the life, when He

chooses to secure the salvation of the soul—or, that a man may *assume, without satisfactory evidence*, his own election, and then give license to the life, under the plea that all is unalterably safe. If this latter were the case, then the statement as employed by the impenitent, would certainly contain something like a valid objection. But that the objection, so far from being valid, is unreasonable, it is the design of this chapter to show—and I pray that it may so appear to the reader, by the time he arrives at the close. With this preparation and caution, concerning the theory advanced in this section, I now proceed to give some reasons for believing it to be correct.

1. From the teaching of the passage at the heading of this chapter.

For in it God, by the apostle, has not only announced the theory, but confirmed it by an example, showing that His purpose relating to this one subject—namely and very emphatically, “according to election”—shall certainly stand. If so, then all those upon whom He has set His love and elected to life, shall certainly see, enter, and enjoy that life; for this is only another form of saying, that His purpose in this, as in every other respect, to the uttermost will be accomplished. And this, the reader must carefully observe, is not equivalent to saying, that because his salvation *may* be certain, therefore it is a matter of indifference what kind of a life he leads.

But it is designed to teach, that if God has elected any, He will so change and protect, restrain and guide that life, that nothing in or around it, can possibly prevent His securing the object of that election. "His counsel will stand, and He will do all His pleasure." But, in this case, His pleasure and counsel are, to save that soul. Consequently, if the reader, though now impenitent, is among the number of those who are chosen to salvation, God will not permit that you shall continue to lead such a life, as will forbid your being finally and forever saved.

Yet this may be saying, that *great reformatory changes* must necessarily occur in that life of yours, in order to your realizing the *end* to which this election refers.

2. Our Saviour Himself taught the same, in language which will scarcely admit of any other construction.

All that the Father hath given me, shall come unto me. Jno. vi. 37. If this be so, *every* such individual will certainly come, and *no being or character* can possibly be allowed to prevent it. Hence, if in this electing purpose there has been given to Christ, a man who is *now* profane, or a gambler, or a drunkard, or dishonest, or an infidel, so certainly will he come to Christ, that these courses of life, one or all of them combined, *will not be permitted* so to interfere as to cause a total failure. Every thing that would cause or threaten that failure, will be removed or overruled. And

every thing needful, as an instrumentality, will be made to work for its accomplishment. The thing *must* be done—because it is God that has purposed it.

3. This teaching is confirmed by the fact, that any are saved.

If there were not this fixed purpose in God, setting His love upon some, and certainly, in the face of all opposition, bringing them forth to favour and to life, who would be able to reach that favour and life? Who *could* be saved? With “deceitful” and “desperately wicked” hearts within us, with the world alluring, and the powers of hell surrounding—all conspiring to impel onward in the course of sin, and to destroy the influence and power of gospel truth—how could *any* hope to escape? In circumstances such as these, how could any be encouraged, even to preach to others the everlasting gospel? The devil is ever ready to catch away the word that is sown in the heart; Matt. xiii. 19; but the purpose of God is, that the word going forth out of his mouth, shall accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sent it. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, are always ready to choke and render the word unfruitful; Matt. xiii. 22; but then the declaration of God is, that “it shall not return unto Him void,” that it shall be as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. Jer. xxiii. 29.

In view of all these considerations—upon which it were possible greatly to enlarge—I am constrained to believe, that the statement at the head of this section, as relating to the future, contains a truth. Therefore, that all and each of the elect of God, be they who, and what, and where-soever, will certainly be saved—will certainly be seen coming to Christ, in God's "accepted time."

But, let us not fail to notice the applicability of the same truth, to the continuance and safety of the *present life*. In view of the Divine teaching already considered, is it not both true and logical to infer, that if God's purpose includes my continuance in life, I shall certainly continue to live? This inference, I am no more permitted to doubt, than that which has just been considered, having reference to the salvation of the soul. I sincerely believe, that every man, without exception, reaches that boundary of life which God knew he would reach—and knew it, *because* He himself had determined and marked that boundary. For this is included in the very idea of a boundary, *as fixed by God*—that it designates a point which shall certainly be reached, as truly as one, beyond which it will be impossible to pass. Hence, as the boundary in question is a definitive limit to the extent of human life, it is quite as true that each *shall arrive* at his own Divinely appointed boundary, as that he shall not go beyond it. That is, no desires, or aims, or

practices of any man, shall be *permitted* to alter or modify this *plan* of God—God's determined boundary must and shall be reached.

I would state this case strongly, as men are prone to use strong language in reference to the subject of salvation, which it is the desire and aim to illustrate. *If* God has fixed those bounds at seventy, no course that the man will be *permitted* to pursue, no means that he or others shall be *permitted* to employ—whether of intemperance, prodigality, exposure to high way robbers, or the dangers of the battle field—will have the least power to *alter* or *shorten* those limits. The Duke of Wellington lived almost through a century of years—though he once was leading the armies, and exposed to the dangers of the plain of Waterloo, where hundreds fell.

And here let the reader guard against inferring a kind of *fatality* attending human life, which renders it a matter of indifference where a person is, how or in what employed. That *such is not my meaning*, hence that such inference is *wrong*, I hope, before closing this chapter, to be able to show. The simple statement *now* is, that God, with so much wisdom, knowledge, and decision, has determined concerning human life, that in no instance will any *unlooked for* emergency arise, or an *unexpected* power assail, or some *unknown* circumstance intervene, which shall be able to modify or defeat that Godlike purpose. That is, when God set the boundary, He did it,

having the whole range, and all the incidents of the future, distinctly before Him. And this is precisely the sentiment presented, respecting the salvation of a soul, in relation to that Divine purpose. In this regard the cases are one.

And here a pleasing inference may be allowed. What an encouragement does the unfailing certainty of God's purpose, as touching the salvation of men, consequently as touching the use of the means of grace also, afford both to preachers and hearers of the gospel! To preachers—because as they labour to set forth the truth, they may feel that among those who hear them are, probably, some of God's chosen ones, though still impenitent—therefore, that of those who hear them, some are heirs of salvation, and shall not fail. This was the very encouragement which God gave to Paul. Acts xviii. 10. So that, though in some cases they may fear that the instrumentality of their preaching will prove “a savour of death unto death”—yet in others they may be cheered by the thought, that it will certainly prove “a savour of life unto life.” And all this simply because, whatever may oppose and threaten, God has purposed to make His word efficient when and where He pleases, in the face of all untoward appearances, and every opposing influence. And it may prove an encouragement to the hearers also—because, if elected by God, it is not a choice by one who may fail of the end He desires; but of Him whom no character, no

temptation, no opposition single or combined, can possibly ever defeat.

If rightly viewed, what a cheering thought would this be to you, dear reader, as you felt how exposed, and yet how helpless and weak you are. Oh ! I entreat you, think of this powerful Friend. Go earnestly beseeching Him, with this as a cherished thought within your heart—*Perhaps*, sinfully as I have lived, and unworthy as I am, I am yet among the number of His elected ones, for whom He has thoughts of mercy, and whom He will finally and forever save. *Perhaps*, though I do not deserve the privilege of styling Him *Master*, even, yet the time may be at hand when He will own the kindred, as I call Him *Father*. *Perhaps*—enrapturing thought !—*perhaps* I am yet to dwell in a heavenly mansion, to render unwearying service in the heavenly temple, and be possessed of the fulness of joy and pleasure forever more, at His right hand. Oh ! then, while it is God's "accepted time," let this be your prompt resolve—

" I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose sceptre pardon gives ;
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer ;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,
 I am resolved to try ;
 For, if I stay away, I know
 I must forever die."

But here, I doubt not, will arise in some minds another form of the same objection. Let us consider it, in

SECT. 5. THE ANALOGY CONTINUED. IF GOD'S INDEPENDENT AND UNCHANGEABLE PURPOSE DOES NOT INCLUDE MY SAFETY—WHETHER FOR THE FUTURE OR PRESENT LIFE—I CANNOT POSSIBLY CHANGE HIS MIND IN REGARD TO EITHER.

As in the preceding section, the language is strong, because it seems to be nearly identical with that, so often employed by those who are still impenitent; and, indeed, it would seem to be a natural inference from all that has now been said. Strong as is the language, and often as it is used in opposition to the claims of the gospel, I nevertheless believe that it contains a gospel truth.

As in the last section, so here also, let the reader carefully note what this language means. You, perhaps, regard and make use of it in the sense of affirming, that however good you might be, and however rightly you might do, though as purely and as excellently as Gabriel himself; yet if you were not among the elect, it would all go for nothing—notwithstanding it all, you would

certainly perish. Such, substantially, I suppose to be a common understanding and use of the doctrine which opens this section—and *professedly*, under cover of it, many pass indifferently all the calls of the gospel. But that this is a *perversion* and *abuse* of the doctrine, will appear from the following considerations.

1. It is directly in the face of every Bible assurance.

Mark how varied and emphatic these assurances are—but always supposing that you heed them in God's "accepted time." If you believe on Jesus Christ—you shall escape the wrath of God, and have everlasting life. Jno. iii. 36. If that faith is associated with genuine love for Him—then shall you certainly receive the end of faith, the salvation of your soul, and be fully and forever possessed of an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. 1 Pet. i. 4—9. If you are born of the Holy Spirit, and by Him led in to truth and duty—you will most assuredly be owned as a child and an heir of God, and in heaven enjoy a glory, with which nothing on earth is worthy to be compared. Jno. iii. 5. Rom. viii. 14—18. If, withal, you separate yourself from the society and sinful practices of those who neglect and dishonour God—you shall be received by the Lord Almighty, as by a Father. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. If you live according to God's counsel here—you cannot fail at last of being received into glory. Ps. lxxiii. 24.

If you do His commandments—you will have right to the tree of life, and shall enter in through the gates into the city. Rev. xxii. 14.

Thus runs the whole testimony of Scripture. And its uniform assurance is, that if you are a regenerated, sincere believer, and leading a holy life, you shall certainly be saved; for salvation, which is eternal life in the presence and favour of God, is held out as the certain portion of all thus prepared. Hence, to speak of a pure and holy being as, after all, perishing from the life and favour of God, is in direct opposition to this Divine testimony, so frequently given and dwelt upon in the Bible, and, therefore, must be false. “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” So that your perishing—if this prove to be your lamentable portion—can never be the *result*, nor in *spite of*, neither can it *indirectly follow*, your regeneration, faith in Christ, and earnest, constant, and persevering efforts to do good, and please God. Nothing but *failure* in these respects, can be followed by such an end.

2. When this objection is urged by the impenitent, it is, uniformly, with the deliberate design of giving himself license to remain impure and sinful, and neglect the duties of religion.

I may safely appeal to the reader, if this is not ordinarily the true and real reason, which at any time prompted you *thus* to object to the claims of God. And, if so, does not such language with such feelings, indicate a decided

preference for sin, rather than *painful despair* of spending eternity in a *holy* heaven, praising and serving a *holy* God? Hence, in every such case, the objection is urged, *not* from the *disheartening* consideration, that perhaps I am not elected, and then all efforts will prove unavailing—this is the merest pretext. But it is urged, from a strong desire to conceal or palliate the enormity of some sinful course, which, from *decided preference*, is pursued—or it is as a licence for the neglect of religious duties, which the *native dislike* of the individual's own heart impels him to disregard. If so, the cause of your continuing in sin, is not to be sought in the doctrine of election, but in that *sinful preference* reigning within yourself. Alas, for such an exhibition of depravity! Such horrible trifling! Boldly endeavouring to sever guilt from one's own sinful preference and practice, to which it *naturally and rightfully belongs*, and fasten it to a revealed doctrine from the everlasting and holy God.

3. By the heading of this section, it is not designed to set forth some particular course of life which one ought to choose and pursue—and then to pronounce, that because an opposing purpose of God is fixed, it will be utterly vain for him thus to choose and pursue.

I beseech the reader to note this, and may God give him grace to understand it. But the design is to state, as a *revealed* truth, that where, in the counsel of God, He has determined a thing, no-

thing will be able to *change* that determination, even though in particular cases painfully unfavourable to some.

This, in one view of the subject, was shown to be the case in the last section, and appeared rather as ground for encouragement. It is no less true, in the view before us in this section, and is no legitimate ground for discouragement, in putting forth effort and striving after the favour of God. Why not discouraging? Because, it is neither stated nor believed, that God has purposed in any case to frustrate *sincere and pious and timely endeavours* to please Him, and make the calling and election sure. Because, also, no man can know concerning himself, except by the *future* and sad results, that the purpose of God does not include all needed assistance and grace. That is, he *cannot know* that he is certainly one of those, whom God has not elected to life and happiness. Therefore, he is just as much warranted, *and far more wise*, to assume that he *is elected*, and *act accordingly*.

Hence, the affirmation and meaning are not, that although one should *truly* ask, yet, because he is not elected, he may not hope to receive—though he should seek, he shall not find.

But it is affirmed and meant, that if the man is not elected, he will be *permitted* to retain his *own* nature, and pursue his *own* way—consequently, that he will be left in sin and hating God. Therefore, the asking, and seeking, and

knocking, will be by him altogether *neglected*—or, if attempted, will be of *such a nature*, spring from *such motives*, be so *perverted*, or so soon *abandoned*, as to forfeit all claim to the promise of receiving and finding. Or—if you please to frame the language more directly in accordance with the point before us—the course of the individual thus left, will fail to present such inducements, as might seem to render it either necessary or desirable for God, so far to alter his purpose, as that this one, whom in his electing love he had originally passed by, should now be included and received. That is, there will be nothing in the individual, which would seem to deserve such a change in the original purpose. Which desert of being thus elected, already in Section Second, has appeared impossible.

Besides, non-election is leaving one to *his own heart's lusts*, and to the blinding influence of sin and Satan. It is *permitting* a man *unrestrained* by grace, and, so far as it is possible for a creature in the government of the Creator, to feel and speak and act as seems to him good. But, as the natural heart is utterly depraved, corrupt, and sinful, the life of such a one, in the sight of God, must necessarily correspond to that heart, and—so far from altering the Divine purpose to include his safety—he, *for his sin*, and sin which he *willingly chose* and *ardently loved*, must consequently perish.

This, however, is not saying, nor is it believed,

that if you, in *God's* "accepted time," begin properly, sincerely, prayerfully, and perseveringly to use the means of grace, appointed and designed for the soul's salvation, He will deny to you His blessing upon those means.

But it is saying, that if you are not included in the number of *God's* elect, your unaided and unblessed heart, supremely in love with sin, will not incline you thus to use them. That, as a consequence, and necessarily, you will altogether and forever fail of the salvation which those means were designed to secure. And permit me here to add, that so long as you find yourself leading a wholly neglectful, indifferent, and sinful life, you are furnishing to yourself fearful cause for trembling, lest that awful failure be your final and endless perdition. For how can you have aught to cheer you in this regard—while *God* is not loved, sin with delight and without penitence is committed, duty and the means of grace are neglected, and, therefore, salvation by *Christ* is not earnestly and anxiously sought, as indispensable to the safety of your soul?

The views thus far expressed, may lead some to conclude, that advocating such a doctrine, it were more consistent to lay aside the work of teaching, and leave men to the election of *God*. Some there are, who always stand ready to draw such inference, whenever and howsoever this subject is presented. But I must now refer such to what has been already said, on the use of

means. (See chap. 2nd.) Moreover, to draw such inference now, is premature ; for the argument is not yet completed. Besides, it is foreign from my purpose, and I cannot stay, to enter into controversy with those of different name, and established in a different belief. My present work is with the impenitent. With the men who have no time to lose in spreading their sails, and moving onward to the haven of God—but yet find, or think they find, their frail bark is heaving and well nigh dashed, against this immovable rock—*God's eternal election*. I long to free them from their danger, before the spiritual mariner's polar Star, "the Star of Bethlehem," is set forever—before God's "accepted time" is ended.

In aid of this, I would now call the reader's attention to the fact, that spiritual affairs are not the only class, concerning which it is beyond his power, to change the plan and purpose of the eternal and unchangeable God. Carefully observe, what perhaps you have been prone to overlook, that the proposition of this section is just as true, touching the *present*, as the future life—the life of the *body*, as of the soul. That the theory, which you are so ready to apply to the latter, it is perfectly scriptural, and therefore true, to apply to the former also. Hence, it would be both scriptural and true, for you to affirm, "If God has purposed to allow me but a few days, or a short life, I cannot by any means change that purpose." Upon this, indeed, I

need not dwell, as it has been already noticed in the Third Section, and is almost a literal declaration of the passage in Job, which we have so fully considered. But I make it here an inference, in the form of a distinct proposition, so that the reader may be able, more easily, to *trace the analogy* between the purpose which defines the length of a man's life in this world, and that which decides concerning his salvation, or life in the future world.

In the present case, the number of the days of men is appointed as a boundary, which none of them can pass. Utterly useless and vain must be the attempt, either to pass those established bounds, or to change the purpose of God concerning them. You may appeal to your extreme youth, unfinished plans, pressing business, devised and engaging schemes of usefulness, and, above all, to your rising, helpless, and dependent family. But, if made while standing on the boundary which God has determined for your life, all these appeals will be in vain. Then, if such be your relation, God, with most unfailing certainty, will require that your wife be left a widow, and your children fatherless. How frequent are the illustrations of this truth, where a husband and father, whom all would feel and say could not yet be spared, as though without regard to the reasons which made his stay still necessary, has been hurried out of life! You may employ and confide in the most skilful phy-

sician ; but, if he be present when the number of your months is just completing, that physician's advice will prove but as folly, and his applications powerless, or as poisons, in the matter of restoring you to life and health. Nothing, absolutely nothing, whether in the form of the strongest bond to earth, or most powerful and appropriate remedies, can in the least avail at such an hour.

In the following sections I wish, by the aid of allusion to the whole as thus far considered, to show the inconsistency of any man's urging the objection which we now consider.

SECT. 6. THE ANALOGY CONTINUED. THE CASES OF
NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE, AS TO THE
ELECTION OF GOD, ARE PRECISELY THE
SAME.

By this is meant, that in both cases and alike, His purpose is formed, and absolutely unalterable. In both cases and alike, it is wholly independent of any thing found in the individual concerned. Hence, whatever applies to one, as to securing an end differing from that purpose, or as to changing or not changing that purpose, applies with *equal force* to the other.

Should the reader be disposed to say, "If God has purposed that I am to be saved, I certainly shall be—" the answer is most appropriate, that as long as He has purposed that you shall live, so long you certainly will continue to live.

Should you still urge, "If God has *not* purposed that I shall be saved, I cannot possibly *change* that purpose, in order to my salvation,"—not less true is it, that if He has not purposed that you shall continue longer in life, you cannot possibly change that purpose, so that additional days will be allowed. Are you ready to infer and say, "This Divine purpose being thus unalterably formed, it is altogether useless for me to be in the least anxious or careful concerning the result?" Very evidently, if such an inference from the purpose of God be correct, touching your *spiritual* life—then, because His purpose concerning your *natural* life, is also unalterably formed, it is quite as useless for you to be in the least anxious or careful concerning it. Mark, dear reader, I do not say that it is folly, or useless, for you to exercise the least anxiety, or put forth any effort in the one case or the other. So far from this—to urge the very *opposite* is the object of this whole chapter, and whole volume. I only say, and this I most sincerely mean, that if you may properly offer the fixed purpose of God concerning your salvation, as a reason for indifference and want of effort in the matters and duties of religion—the same reason is quite as full of meaning, forms quite as strong and appropriate an apology, should you offer it for doing nothing, and caring nothing, concerning the comfort, support, and prolonging of your natural life. In short, if this Divine purpose cripples action in the one

case, there is the same reason for its crippling action in the other.

This seems manifest. What is it that is offered by the impenitent, as a sufficient reason for disregarding the proposed services which religion enjoins? His reason which now engages us is, the fact of this whole matter having been already determined by God, and the impossibility of modifying or altering what He has once determined. But then this *same unchangeableness* has already appeared, as belonging equally to His determination, concerning the ordinary life of man *in this world*.

Then wherein do they differ? Alike in *both* cases an unalterable purpose has been formed. And, in causing that purpose to be *changed*, or in securing a result, *differing, in the least*, from that to which this purpose looks, all efforts must be *alike*, but *no more* futile, in the one case than in the other. Do what we will, be or go whithersoever, use whatever plans, efforts, means, still *the purpose* is the same—as truly the same, whether you consider it as bearing upon the present or future life—upon the life of the body or the soul.

Notice, it is not affirmed, that it is a matter of total indifference what may be your character, engagements, or situation—that a man is quite as wise to neglect health as to care for it, to spurn the claims of religion as to yield to them. This the writer does not believe. And this the reader

himself, when applied to *natural* health and life, just as little believes and practises. But this is not the point which we now consider. The attempt is not to show the necessary connection between the means and the end, (which was the theme of Chapter 2nd,) or, that God, in forming His purpose, included all the means as well as the end.

But in this section, the Divine purpose itself engages us—and with this point touching it, we are chiefly concerned—that whatever means you may employ, and whatever end you may secure, *the purpose of God* has not in the least been affected. In all cases the result will be found the same at the end, that He from the beginning had designed. And that this will be quite as true, respecting the end of your *bodily* life—as the condition of your soul in the future. Most ardently do I desire to have the reader both to apprehend the meaning here, and also to believe and feel the truth. What truth?

That whatever difficulty you find growing out of the election of God, so as to be offered as a reason for your impenitence and your sin, is either an imaginary or pretended difficulty. If not, then because a real reason, it is *equally* strong, and bears with the *same* directness, against your doing any thing to secure a return of health, or a continuance of life. For no more plainly are we taught that “the purpose of God according to election must stand”—than that He hath so

numbered the months, and “appointed the bounds” of the life of man, that “none can pass.”

SECT. 7. IF WHAT WAS SAID IN THE LAST SECTION BE TRUE, MEN ARE GUILTY OF A GREAT INCONSISTENCY HERE.

In the one case, respecting the *present* life, *notwithstanding* God’s purpose, we find them anxious, careful, and diligent. In the other, concerning the safety of the soul or the *future* life, *they plead that purpose*, as a reason for *not* being anxious, careful, and diligent. And the reason for pronouncing this inconsistent is, because, while the purpose in both cases is *alike*, strong and unchangeable, the course of action is so *totally different*.

View the fact as to seasons of exposure. There are times when, in the providence of God, men are thrown into what are styled dangers—great dangers. And I may properly here observe, the reason why this name has been affixed to them, is because of their great liability to hurry out of life. I say *liability*, merely ; because men often pass through these so called dangers, unharmed. For instance, cars, at the rate of thirty miles to the hour, have run from the track. Here is the danger. But while by it *some* have been killed, *hundreds* have escaped. In all cases of this nature, between those who are lost and those who escape unharmed, the disproportion is exceedingly great. Yet where is

the individual who, *because his life was secured* by the purpose of God—even with all the *probabilities* which experience presents of escaping harm and death—would formally agree that the engineer, when he had thus increased the speed, or indeed at any speed, designedly run the cars from the appointed track? Nay more. If circumstances clearly indicated that such an occurrence must certainly take place, would he not, without hesitation, delay his journey, even though at much personal inconvenience? That is, God's positively formed and unalterable purpose, concerning the duration of human life, notwithstanding—yet, if possessed of reason, men do not knowingly, willingly, and deliberately rush into danger, or hazard their lives. The man who would affirm, that God had decided how long he is to live, and then, *for that reason*, bury the razor's blade within his throat, or the pistol's charge within his brain, would leave behind him evidence strong enough to convince a Coroner's jury, or a court of justice, that he acted thus devoid of reason.

Hence, we may safely infer, as something which all admit, that there are certain things which are to be regarded as methods by which life is hazarded, and may be destroyed. That to rush into these willingly and without sufficient cause, is not only negatively unwise, but absolute and positive madness—madness, even though one should remember that God had determined

concerning the length of his life, and that no being or power could *alter* that determination. The ready and obvious solution being, the ordinarily intimate and necessary connection between the use of means, and the very end which God has determined.

But to the same individual, thus feeling and thus judging, let me speak of certain courses which all acknowledge to be wrong, as *spiritual* dangers—pursuing which, a man risks the loss of his immortal soul. Let me carefully specify to him some of these, which the Bible designates as dangers of this nature—namely, intemperance, lying, profanity, dishonesty, prodigality, Sabbath breaking, scoffing, and such like; or, if you please, being free from practices *outwardly* enormous, then add to the list of dangers, simple unbelief in the truth and Son of God, “loving pleasure more than God.” And, in view of these dangers, let me entreat such a one, as I earnestly desire of all, to turn and escape. Let me assure him, as I most certainly believe, that persisting in his present course he must irrevocably perish. And what shall be the result of these calls and efforts? Alas! how often will it be urged, as a sufficient reason for no alarm, and to embolden in the ways of sin, that if God has purposed to save him he will be saved. But wherefore this reply? Has not God Himself declared concerning these and other sinful practices, that they assuredly place the soul in peril—inasmuch, that

heavenly and eternal life, is not possible to him that continues them? And *if* He has thus declared, can you, my reader, see any propriety in replying, that you will nevertheless persist, because if He has purposed to save you, you will yet be saved? What unmeaning, and wicked, and daring language! Why He has purposed just the *opposite* of salvation, to those who persist in sin. And do you not discover, that so far from any ground of encouragement or peace being thus afforded, so long as you pursue a pathway which God has said certainly ends in ruin, you have *presumptive* evidence to yourself, that you have *not* been elected, and therefore have cause for alarm rather than composure? I cannot possibly discover how this election bears, with the least possible force, more upon the spiritual than natural, temporal dangers. And yet I do see the gross inconsistency of men, urging it in the former case, and not in the latter. The very man who, when urged from the ways of sin, would suppose that, by reference to the election of God, he had presented a famous and unanswerable reason for non-compliance—would be quite as slow as any other, in quaffing a portion of poison, or discharging a pistol at his vitals, because of the truth that God had determined the length of his life. And yet to urge this purpose would, as we have seen, be urging a truth—and present an objection quite as valid

and unanswerable in the latter case as in the former.

Then why not in the same way employ it? Why not as readily urge the purpose of God and indulge freely in the use of poison, as to urge His purpose, and indulge freely in the dangerous and ruinous course of sin? Permit me, in a single particular, to answer this inquiry. I believe it to be, because in the former case men understand, and tacitly at least concede, that whatever may be the purpose of God on *one* point, it is neither the design nor ordinary tendency of that purpose, to change the nature and constitution of things. For instance, the purpose of God concerning the duration of man's life, has neither the design nor tendency to alter the nature of poison, so that it shall not be poison still—still fatal to the life of him who, to a certain quantity, presumes to take it. And so I say on the main subject now before us. This Divine purpose is not designed to change the properties of sin so that, by whomsoever committed, it shall not prove to be abominable and fatal still. From its very nature, it is a deadly poison in relation to the life of the soul, as truly as certain drugs are ruinous to the physical life. As such it must be both regarded and treated, or the most deadly evils shall certainly be realized. This the Bible every where and most emphatically assures us.

Then why, dear reader, O tell me why, you do not show the same precaution here, as in expo-

sure of any kind to temporal danger and evil? Why will you deliberately hazard your immortal soul, when you so tremble and shrink at thoughts of hazard to your body only? Why, O why, will you not use precaution, God's election notwithstanding, when that election or determining purpose no more exists, and no more applies, in the former case than in the latter?

In illustration of the same inconsistency, notice the efforts for recovery from sickness and disease. Let a man be thus affected, and does he pause a moment to talk about the purpose of God concerning the issue of his disease? Does he not feel, and *act* as if he felt, that his first business is with those who understand his malady, to hear advice, receive attention, and apply the remedies, that may be found necessary in his case? And do we not find, that his eagerness thus and earnestly to engage is uniformly increased, in exact proportion to his sense of danger? Why is this? Why careful to use any means, or apply any remedies, in order to a return of health? Is it because, in regard to life and health in this world, God has no well defined purpose—but chooses to leave the result entirely in the hands of the individual concerned? This cannot be: for we have already seen, that God has accurately numbered the months, and fixed impassable bounds to human life—all this so unchangeably done, that no care and effort, however earnestly

and diligently employed, can ever, in the least, increase that number, or extend those bounds. And yet, this truth notwithstanding, the individual thus will strive, as if to prolong his life; *and he does wisely* thus to strive.

But is it so, in the matter of religion and the soul? Say to the impenitent, that they are in such need, and so dependent upon God for adapted help, as to require the renewing of his Holy Spirit, and faith in the vicarious work of His only Son Jesus Christ, essential preparation to a successful and happy approach unto God Himself.

Urge, moreover, that in order to a consistent hope of such preparation, they absolutely need a diligent use of prayer, the Sabbath, the word both read and preached, and practical obedience to the Divine law—all, as being regularly appointed, and Divinely established means to such an end. And is this important counsel received, and promptly acted upon? So far from it, we soon discover, that though in such need, as to be in danger of utterly and finally perishing, by the malady of sin—yet, they can deliberately delay, or refuse the essential effort required of them, in talking about the election of God, and, with apparent gravity, urging it as a reason for their indifference and neglect. But observe—they so plead, while there is no more room for such a plea, nor force of application in it, than there would be, if urged as a reason for neglecting means, in order to recovery from any bodily

disease. They so plead, while God's election no more fetters effort for the life of the soul, than for the health and life of the body.

If you, my reader, are guilty of such an inconsistent and foolish course, let me urge you seriously to consider, why this difference. It is an important point, and one which, in *your* case, will finally be tested, as to its validity. If it is trifling with interests which are the dearest—because they are the interests of your soul—you cannot always trifle. God is not deceived, and will not be mocked. And when, at last, he undertakes publicly to expose the fallacy of this excuse, and decide your destiny to be the legitimate result of a course so foolish, it will be a solemn and awful moment. *Then*—God's "accepted time" having fully passed—for you, there will be no more return to the means which, once possessed, you treated with such trifling and neglect.

I beseech you, therefore, to remember, and *act* as if you felt, that as there are *means* for us all to use, in order to recovery and comfort in the natural life, so *equally* true is it in the spiritual. Bear in mind, how universal is the testimony of experience, that in the *latter* case, as truly as in the former, God's purpose concerning the end, includes also the use of known and appropriate means. Learn, and forget not, that there are means which a man cannot possibly treat with neglect or indifference—and, at the

same time, with impunity—in the *latter* case, more than in the former.

A single instance will sufficiently illustrate. The Bible says, “It pleases God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” Now, I entreat you, notice this passage. Here is the election of God, including the salvation of men, and this resting on His good pleasure. But is it their salvation, the end alone, to which His good pleasure refers? It pleases Him to save them, it is true. Still, we are here told that it pleases Him, also, to make use of the preaching of the gospel, as His own *instrumentality*, in order to that salvation. If so, then undoubtedly, His election to save, must include also the instrumentality, not only as being appointed by God, but, *to be employed by men*. Hence, to plead indifference to the means of salvation simply because the salvation itself is determined by God, must be altogether and decidedly vain. For, if His election include the means, in order to salvation as the end, and you are neglecting the means which He has made known, what ever they may be, then where the propriety of thinking of the end? If it is proper, as touching your salvation, it would be equally proper in the case of bodily disease. But, in this latter case, you neither believe nor act upon that principle, as being either proper, or consistent with common sense. Then let me entreat you, not to hazard the loss of your soul, by a course of inconsistency, which your

daily practice in other matters, continually condemns. Believe me, it is presumption to speak of your election to the end, when your constant *treatment of the means*, bears continual witness against you. Be assured, if you are elected to the end, the *evidence* will and must appear, in a diligent, earnest, anxious, and persevering use of the means. Why? Because, if such be the good pleasure of God concerning you, He has elected you to the use of the means of grace, just as certainly as to the salvation by grace, for which those means were appointed.

Hence, till that evidence appears, every thing testifies against your being safe. O, then, use the means for escaping the wrath upon your soul, even more eagerly than you would use the means to be freed from some malignant, deadly disease upon your body—for the end of that wrath unremoved, will be "*the second death*." Pleading the eternal election of God, will neither deliver nor relieve you *then*. But casting yourself upon His mercy, in the use of means, will certainly and permanently deliver you *now*—while it is God's "accepted time." O, then, cease from vanity. Henceforth, let the language of both your heart and life be—

"I would not be much concerned,
Nor vainly long to see,
In volumes of his deep decrees,
What months are writ for me.

When He reveals the book of life,
O may I read *my name*,
Amongst the chosen of His love,
The followers of the Lamb !"

SECT. 8. THIS EXCUSE, DRAWN FROM THE ELECTION OF GOD, DERIVES ITS SEMBLANCE OF FORCE, FROM A WRONG APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE.

I pray God that my meaning here, and the force of it, may come home to the reader's conscience, and his heart. Men are exhorted to attend to their souls, and use the means appointed for their salvation. They in turn reply, that the purpose of God is formed, and they cannot change it. But this reply is wholly inappropriate, because aside from the end proposed.

Changing the purpose of God, is not the object for which any are called upon to use these means. This, not only is not, but *ought not*, to be the design of any effort. He must be devoid of reason, that would thus urge ; he must be mad, that would thus attempt. A puny creature, with breath in his nostrils which is derived directly from God Himself, and in every other respect, wholly dependent upon Him, and yet thinking, presuming, to change His eternal purpose. To speak thus, is a great perversion and abuse of language. And yet, as already intimated, this is the common way of speaking, and, perhaps it is a fruitful source of difficulty on this

whole subject. And, I may add, not only as employed by the impenitent, but by others, also, of different belief—who, nevertheless, are using the means, and, I fain would believe, are actually included among the elect of God. I am anxious that all and alike, should know and understand this perversion, so that they may avoid the evil.

When any preacher of the gospel calls upon men, to use the means Divinely appointed, in order to salvation—let not this call be nullified by saying, that in view of God's purpose being fixed, it is utterly vain to urge men to use the means, because that purpose cannot be changed. Such a reply may be very acceptable to a heart still choosing the ways of sin, as affording encouragement and security therein. But it is a reply, however, that does not really bear upon the point, to which the exhortation refers, and is wanting both in common logic, and common reason. If I say to you, my reader, place the lever upon that fulcrum, and thereby attempt to move this rock—would it not be like the chattering of an idiot for you to reply, If I use that lever thus, it will not move the world? You were not asked to move the world, but only the ten thousand, million, millionth part of it—as related to the whole, less than the merest pebble to the mountain. Just so is it in the case of your salvation. If urged to use the appropriate means, in the appointed way, and in God's "accepted time," in order to secure that

end—is it not equally idle for you to reply, Though I *thus* should use such means, I cannot change the purpose of God concerning me? Change the purpose of God! Why, who ever presumed to call upon you, to undertake a work like that? Who could possibly pray for your success, if you were thus to attempt?

What! change the electing purpose of God—when by it, Gabriel and his fellows are bound to Himself, so that they shall not fall, as Satan and his fellows fell? Change a purpose—which forms the only guarantee, that from every kindred, tribe, and tongue, the redeemed of God shall come, eternally to praise Him? Change a purpose—effecting which, and you have at once divested the universe of an independent, sovereign God? Change a purpose—which consoles the believer with the thought, that though adverse powers assail him, even the gates of hell shall not prevail?

Could I feel that ungodly men, by any means, had power to change the purpose of the absolute and mighty God, I certainly should despair of my own, and be discouraged in labouring for their salvation. No, verily—it is because of the belief, that wherever truth is brought to the attention of men, there may be some chosen of God to salvation, that I am encouraged to come in with my feeble instrumentality, in order to the accomplishment of that end. And I use the instrumentality, not presuming, not even hoping,

to change the Divine purpose in any case. But solely because, where God elects to salvation, He chooses to do it by the use of means. Hence, the hope, that where He has chosen to afford the means, there are some at least to whom He has purposed to make them effectual. This thought it is, that encourages. This, that fills with zeal and delight, while serving as an instrument in the hand of God, for effecting such results. Thus, you perceive, so far from this purpose hindering effort, it forms the grand inducement for putting forth that effort. And the same considerations may properly encourage the impenitent reader also. With such a heart, such an alluring world, such a wily adversary as the devil—depending on yourself, it were impossible to think of safety, in the use of all the means, within the range of human knowledge, or human power. But, in view of this subject, you can feel and say, Perhaps God has set His love upon me. If so, then this deceitful heart, this alluring world, and my arch enemy the devil, shall have no power, to keep me separate from that love. For, if God be for me, who can be against me? Rom. viii. 31. Perhaps, also, *this* is the occasion, and *these* the instrumentalities, which He has designed to bless, to breaking the reign of Satan and of sin, and bringing me into the liberty of the sons of God. O! I will *now* arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and be-

fore thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants. Luke xv. 18, 19.

With something of this feeling, I intreat you, “*now*” listen to those who are urging you to attend upon the means of grace—because “*now*,” and *now only*, is God’s “accepted time.” And, while yielding to their persuasion, confidently, yet humbly hope for your own salvation, as the *sure* and *glorious* result. But, O ! never again so vainly and so inconsistently urge the powerlessness of those means, to change the purpose of God. Surely, you neither think nor speak of changing the Divine mind, when using remedies for sickness. Why ? Because you well understand, that although God has His purpose concerning you, unalterably formed, yet *He works by means employed by us*, and gives no hope of a favourable result, without them. Hence, though as to what His purpose concerning you may be, you are entirely ignorant, yet, *desirous of the end*, you earnestly use the means.

Upon precisely the same principle do I entreat you, earnestly to employ the means, that He has appointed and acknowledged, as means of grace, designed for man’s salvation. Thus employ them, never with the thought of disturbing the unalterable plan of God—but because, “as many as are ordained to eternal life,” must, *through these means*, humbly, zealously, prayerfully, and believingly employed, look to “Jesus, the Author and Fin-

isher of faith," in order to their salvation. And, I beseech you remember, that touching your own personal salvation, the mystery, which now you plead as in your way, will soon, very soon, be all removed.

"The day of Jesus Christ," shall certainly and unmistakeably reveal it. But, remember too, that if *then* you find yourself in a radical mistake, it will be *too late* to rectify it—for then, God's "accepted time," as a "day of salvation," will have passed away forever. Then, and thenceforward, you will not think of Divine decrees, as forbidding you to pray. But then, and thenceforward, though you call in prayer, He will not answer—though, in agony and imploringly, you stretch out your hands towards Him, He will not regard it. Prov. i. 24—33. With the fearful scenes, and the final and unalterable decisions, of that judgment day distinctly before you, O! vainly excuse yourself no longer. But, now in the "accepted time" and day of salvation, Give all diligence, to make your calling and your election sure. 2 Pet. i. 10.

See! though God has an election known to Himself, how *He calls upon you to assure yourself* of an interest in it. Do so—by a most diligent endeavour, to work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling. Phil. ii. 12. Do so—by earnest attention to Divine truth, both read and preached, that you may the better understand what salvation is—what is implied in being

saved—and how salvation can be obtained. Do so—by fervent, persevering prayer. Seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near—Isa. lv. 6, 7—remembering, that He is ever near and may be found, so long as it is *His* “accepted time,” and that “now,” *now only*, is His accepted time.

If *now* you feel the first moving of desire toward God and heaven—the least alarm or uneasiness on account of sin—look upon that as gracious encouragement; but *do not delay*. Had God elected none to salvation, you would have had no encouragement, nor have felt the least disposition, to seek for mercy. Yours, then, would have been a hopeless condition—and, utter hopelessness most effectually closes both heart and lips, against any approach to the throne of grace. But, God has elected from our race, unto salvation, a great multitude that no man can number. Rev. vii. 9. And, if you sincerely desire His mercy, and especially, if you are *now* penitently and earnestly *seeking* it, therein you have a most cheering and reliable intimation, of *God's purpose to save you*. As before remarked, it is only when you are *indifferent*, and are seeking excuses for *delay*, that you have fearful reason for doubting, whether you are of the number of God's elect, and are yet and forever to be saved. O! while it is an “accepted time,” repent and turn to the Lord—and, in His name I assure you, He will make it to you a “day of salvation.”

He will abundantly pardon, renew, and sanctify, for that is His revealed decree which belongs to us. Deut. xxix. 29.

Thoughts like these, what interest should they awaken!—to what energetic action should they prompt!

“ Am I called ? and can it be ?
Has my Saviour chosen me ?
Guilty, wretched as I am,
Has He named my worthless name ?
Vilest of the vile am I,
Dare I raise my hopes so high ?

“ Am I called ? *I dare not stay,*
May not, must not disobey ;
Here, I lay me at thy feet,
Clinging to the mercy-seat ;
Thine I am and thine alone,
Lord, with me *thy will* be done.”

THE END.









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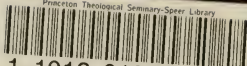
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